Dissent

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TEN YEARS AFTER THE FALL

POST-COMMUNIST REFLECTIONS

• SHLOMO AVINERI
• MARSHALL BERMAN • PAUL BERMAN
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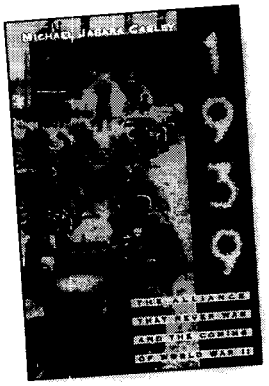

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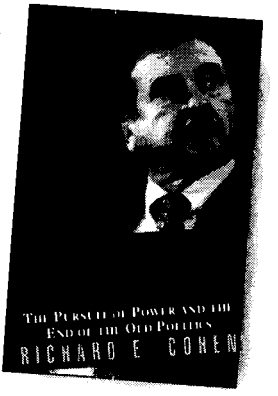

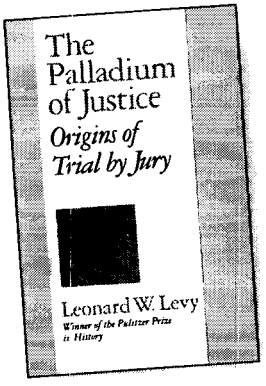

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Editor's Page

How does the miraculous year 1989 look ten years later? We asked a number of friends to respond to some questions about the fall of communism and the standing, afterward, of the democratic left. The responses are a characteristically *Dissent*ish mix of celebration and anxiety. I would certainly have been torn between the two. Celebration because the collapse of a tyrannical state and a repressive empire is always something to celebrate—though we don't seem to remember how to do it: where are the songs that commemorate the fall? Has anyone written an ode ("a lyric poem marked by exaltation of feeling") for the occasion? Do we have a script for ceremonial re-enactments of the glorious moment? In fact, anxiety has succeeded in undercutting our celebratory passion. ■ The fall of communism led to an upsurge of nationalist emotion and a series of bitter conflicts over land and power. The conflicts are mostly local and limited; the power at stake isn't the power to kill millions of people, only thousands; the great tyranny has been replaced by smaller, weaker, more dispersed tyrannies. But if this is a gain for humanity (it is), it isn't the gain we hoped for. The ethnic killing and cleansing have cast a shadow over the memory of '89. ■ Still, some surprisingly decent regimes have risen from the debris of empire. And the left is free at last of its Stalinist incubus. We will have new opportunities to defend equality and democratic participation. At the end of the century and the millennium, the world, and our part of it too, is a little brighter. ■ A small example of the new opportunities is provided by the political fight over Social Security and the budget surplus here at home. We print two articles describing what's going on and suggesting what ought to be done. The two make similar arguments but in such different tones, expressing such different political sensibilities, that they form a useful pair. ■ Jim Rule's piece in the last issue, the articles on Kosovo, and the Cohen/Ackerman debate about public support for opera, have brought us a lot of mail. We devote four pages to letters in this issue, and would happily keep doing that. Some magazines solicit letters, sending provocative articles to people likely to be provoked. That's a good policy; it makes for a lively letters section, but we don't have the staff to carry it off. So let me solicit letters here. We are eager to publish readers' comments, arguments, protests, even, though we will do this less often, appreciative notes. It is best to write early in the quarter. Sometimes we can't print letters because they repeat criticisms that we have solicited for the Arguments section. But a magazine like *Dissent* needs dissents, and we will print as many as we can.

— M.W.

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Ten Years After 1989

The fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet bloc initiated a sweeping transformation of world politics. How should we think about these momentous events and their implicatons a decade later? Dissent *asked a group of European and American writers and thinkers for postcommunist reflections in response to three questions: (1) What did you think would happen in 1989?, (2) Were you right or wrong—and why?, and (3) What are the implications for your political thinking?*—EDS.

Shlomo Avineri

HOW DID I understand the unraveling of communism? There were two dimensions. First, I thought the Soviet Union had finally proven to be the failure it was destined to be. Second, I had grave doubts as to whether democratization would go comfortably hand in hand with the development of market capitalism. I argued on several occasions that postcommunist developments would be far from uniform. This was why I found the faux-Hegelian triumphalism of Francis Fukuyama so annoyingly wrong. Its ideological subtext was simplistic Hayekian messianism. The idea that the end of the communist "idea" could be construed as an End of History was preposterous.

The historical development of Eastern Europe was actually arrested under the guise of Marxist-Leninism. Even if one is not a historical determinist, one can argue that what communism did to Russia in 1917, and to Central and Eastern Europe after 1945, was to thwart an eventual evolution toward Western-style societies. It also meant that the nationalist fervors unleashed by the destruction of three multinational empires (the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman) were being "overcome" only through repression coupled with a universalist ideology of revolution and mass mobilization.

Conventional wisdom had it that communism, either in its brutal Stalinist incarnation or the more benign Titoist version, at least succeeded in subduing extreme nationalism. This was one reason why many intellectuals applauded it, despite their criticisms of Stalinism. Communism was seen as a guarantee against vicious chauvinism. I thought, however, that neither the Soviet Union nor Yugoslavia actually created a postnationalist environment that would endure because the complex give-and-take of pluralist democracy was missing. Oppression could drive nationalism underground; it would not destroy it.

PERHAPS ONE reason for my skepticism is the fact that as an Israeli I witnessed how immigrants coming from the Soviet Union to the Jewish state in the 1970s brought with them the sort of memories and sometimes a Jewish consciousness that we had assumed destroyed by decades of Soviet persecution. If those memories remained vivid among scattered Soviet Jews, I thought, surely the same is so for other ethnic and religious groups who lived contiguously in their historical lands. It may also be that my research on the early socialist (and later socialist-Zionist) Moses Hess suggested to me that he, not Marx, was right about the abiding power—and value—of history, memory, and culture.

This was the context in which I observed Polish, Hungarian, and Czech resistance to Soviet-imposed rule over the years. I had difficulties with some colleagues who viewed the events of 1956 and 1968 solely as resistance to communism. In my mind, they were also linked to national motives. Anticommunism was wed to and sometimes manipulated by anti-Soviet feelings. "Solidarity" in Poland was, after all, not only an anticommunist movement. It had roots within Poland's Catholic-

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oriented nationalism; Russia was an old historical enemy, not just a recent communist one. Similarly, the strongest and most coherent anticommunist forces in the Baltics and the Caucasus during the Gorbachev era were centered around the national fronts.

And consider Yugoslavia. I greatly admired the Titoist effort to foster "brotherhood and unity" among nations that had recently been massacring each other. But I also recognized how fragile this attempt was. (Anyone familiar with the internal nuances, if not tensions, among the "Praxis" group of dissident Marxist philosophers would have discerned ethnic lines—even among them.)

ALL THIS leads me to the conclusion that it was not simply abstract noble ideas that carried the day against oppression in 1989; much more concrete aspects of collective human consciousness were at work. Likewise, countries with more coherent and longstanding traditions of civil society (the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary) appear to be making much more headway today than those without them, like Russia or Ukraine. After all, with some rare and noble exceptions like Andrei Sakharov and the small group of intellectuals around him, Russia did not bring forth any broadly based dissident group comparable to Solidarity or Charter 77. There were no Russian Havels or Walesas. The most meaningful—and on a personal level, most courageous —icon of Russian anticommunism was not a liberal but Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who still expresses some of the murkier depths of the vaunted "Russian soul." Russia's political scene didn't develop in a way comparable to those of Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary. Practically all its leading politicians today are former communists, not dissidents. The road toward democracy in Russia appears as problematic as ever.

There are such things as historical building blocks, and they cannot be overlooked just because they are contrary to the conventional wisdom of Marxism or liberalism. Grand designs are their own worst enemies—whether inspired by Marx or by Milton Friedman. The great difficulties Russia faces in fostering a stable capitalism suggest that the Western market system is far from being a final goal of world history. Not that there is an obvious Russian *Sonderweg*. It is just that there is no predetermined course that all societies are destined to follow. Particular histories always clash with universal ideas, and the outcome is never predetermined.

So one lesson of 1989 is the need to respect and have some humility in front of particularity and to be cautious about imposing simplistically those universal ideas. We need to listen to people's own poetry, know their history, understand their traumas. Of course many particular identities are "constructed," "imagined" (so too is the idea of the "individual"): but once constructed or imagined they become actual in the Hegelian sense of the term. People act on them, and they have consequences. As we struggle with the aftermath of the recent Kosovo war—which disrupted a self-contented and unprepared Europe—one wishes that the post-1989 triumphalists had listened a little more to these muffled voices. ●

SHLOMO AVINERI is professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and author, among other books, of *Moses Hess, Prophet of Communism and Zionism*.

WANDERING THE WEB?

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Marshall Berman

In 1989, my life was coming apart, and there wasn't a thing I could do. It was hard to get through the day, and even harder to make it through the night. That year I really loved my TV set. I could turn it on at any weird hour—CNN, just come on line, felt specially made for me—and see what people around the world were doing. And in 1989 they were doing plenty! I could see students in Beijing, playing guitars, singing freedom songs, and marching around with their Statue of Liberty. I could see the Bucharest crowd, assembled by the state to back the Ceauescus, call instead for their downfall, and I could actually see the dictator on his balcony shake—CNN replayed that moment again and again. I could see Prague's Velvet Revolution as it dawned. I could see the people of both sides of Berlin tear down their Wall. I could see the great modern dream of the Social Contract—of oppressed and alienated people coming together to create a new society—coming true in real places in real time.

Modern mass media played a crucial role in 1989: the people who were making history saw each other on television, and felt subliminal but real worldwide support. The media made it clear, too, how 1960s countercultural visions and sounds of freedom, so often pronounced dead, were alive and well around the world: Lou Reed and Frank Zappa as honored guests in Prague, Pink Floyd urged to play "The Wall" as the Wall came down, Bob Dylan's and John Lennon's songs sung in Beijing by kids who knew any day they could die. News television in 1989, especially on cable, suddenly found itself with blocks of air time to fill; it sought out "faces in the crowd"; without looking very hard, it found a multitude of ordinary people who had been out in the streets for days or weeks, who were sometimes silly but often smart and complex, ragged and drained but radiant, amazed that history was giving them a chance to act like human beings. What made 1989 so great is that it gave that chance to so many. Not to me: all year I was trapped in my cave. But it was a thrill to be able to see all those people, including so many who felt like kindred spirits, out in the sunlight. I could imagine that someday maybe I'd get a chance to act human, too.

Of course there was trouble soon, just as there was trouble after the people of Paris tore down the Bastille. In some ways it was the same trouble. The great French declaration of 1789 sanctifies various "inalienable rights of *l'homme*," but also says that all power emanates from "*la nation*." Before the end of the 1790s, it was clear that the idea of human rights had become a screen for French imperial ambitions and interests. No state, in the West or anywhere else, has resolved the dangerous ambiguities of 1789. The great popular movements of 1989 grew and thrived and brought people into the streets in the name of human rights, against communist regimes that travestied or simply crushed them. But, with a few exceptions, these movements metamorphosed as soon as they attained power: their language of human rights pretty much disappeared, and visions of ethnic purity defined their new horizons.

When the Popular Front of Lithuania split its nation off from the USSR, one of its very first decrees proposed to expel from citizenship the 45 percent of the country that was ethnically Russian, and thus to deprive them of jobs, housing, and pensions, which were available only to citizens. In response to a widespread outcry, the Popular Front offered ethnic Russians a reprieve: if they passed exams in Lithuanian, they could stay. My first thought was that the Lithuanians didn't "get it," the spirit of '89; but plenty of people said they got it perfectly, it was only cosmopolitan liberals like me who hadn't a clue. The universalism of John Lennon and 1960s rock-and-roll found a new lease on life in 1989; but in 1990, so it seemed, a host of xenophobic metal bands—like Guns N' Roses, famous for its slashes against "niggers and immigrants"—kicked the sixties out of the flat. ("Thus," said Karl Marx, "Locke replaced Habakkuk.") Neo-*Führers* like Milosevic and

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Tudjman have been brilliant in mobilizing men with guns to fulfill their visions of "ethnic cleansing"; but they have succeeded so well only because the idea itself, with its inherent potential for genocide, turns out to be pretty typical of the post-Soviet political mainstream. However, "we" shouldn't be so quick to blame "them": the ethnically pure *Volkstaat* has an all-too-solid place in the political theory and practice of the West.

THE HORRORS of ethnic cleansing in recent Eastern Europe have increased my admiration for the USA, but also, ironically, for the USSR. (And of course for Tito's Yugoslavia.) I think Hegel got it right in the 1820s, when he said citizenship should derive from residence in a territory and obedience to its laws, *and that was all*. Hegel agreed that it was a pleasure to feel identity with a *Volk*, and it should be a right, especially in a cosmopolitan world economy, but he said citizenship should be based on territory and behavior, not on blood. (Because he didn't believe in the *Volkstaat*, and didn't want Germany to become one, Hegel was long considered "reactionary.") Socialists have to distinguish our visions of community from the *Volkstaat*. We need to make it clear, to ourselves as much as the world, that we want to bring people together, but we don't want them all to be one people. The crowd that tore down the Wall and danced on it came from everywhere in the world. That's where I want to live. "*Imagine* . . ." That's my spirit of '89. ●

MARSHALL BERMAN teaches political theory and urbanism at the City University of New York and is the author of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* and *Adventures in Marxism*.

Paul Berman

WHAT WERE my expectations for Eastern and Central Europe ten years ago? I did have my hopes. They were vast. I was hoping, a little wistfully, to see a new kind of society arise—a society with socialist values and libertarian practices. A republic of workers' councils.

I had my logic. A libertarian socialist aspiration had become fairly popular in student movements all over the West circa 1968, which put me in a large company in the years that followed. I could cite a considerable theoretical literature, written by genuinely brilliant thinkers who speculated about the libertarian and socialist possibilities in the old Soviet bloc, if only the communists could be overthrown. I could cite historical precedents—aspects, for instance, of the East German workers' movement in 1953, of the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956, and of the Czechoslovak reform in 1968. I could cite the example of Polish Solidarity. Some of the more imaginative people in Poland during the 1980s gave active thought to the very ideas that I am describing. And so, I convinced myself that my own hopes were more than idle fancies.

Why was I wrong? I wasn't, entirely. The 1989 revolution broke out, and I went to what was then Czechoslovakia, looking for instances of workers taking over production and forming democratic councils to administer the enterprises, exactly as predicted in the writings of Cornelius Castoriadis and C. L. R. James, who were my theoretical guides. And I found those instances, plenty of them. I wrote at some length about one—a colorful but fairly representative effort by the members of the Czech Philharmonic to take over their own orchestra.

The rebelling workers of 1989 did not want to create a republic of workers' councils, though—not in Czechoslovakia or anywhere else. The East bloc workers organized their revolutionary councils and shop committees only as steps toward building a Western-type liberal market democracy. Why had I failed to predict such an aspiration? And why did I fumble for a moment, before recognizing those liberal hopes as right and appropriate?

It was for reasons that seem painful to me now. The highest intentions of solid left-wingers

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like myself were these: to undo poverty, to make work more creative and fulfilling, to put muscle into the pieties of social solidarity, and to impose a rationality on large social and economic decisions. We leftists clung to a very peculiar way of expressing those intentions, though. We insisted on the utility of left-wing theory. And there our problems began. For, in the twentieth century, left-wing theory has been a giant telescope, trained on the past.

We members of the anticommunist left imagined that we were too smart to get lost in the past. We fought against communism, and the communists and their friends fought back, and our name was mud in the *Nation* magazine; and our struggles and even our enemies confirmed our self-esteem. We thought we could already make an adequate distinction between good leftism and bad leftism, between leftism's virtues and its perversions. We were right. We could. But our rightness prevented us from noticing that, in our own fashion, we, too, as much as any slippery *Nation* editor or forthright Fidelista or honest Sandinista, had gotten frozen in the past.

Our ideas prevented us from seeing how thoroughly the liberal democracies had evolved over the decades, how creative the economies had become, how much opportunity the liberal democracies offered to individuals and to societies. We only saw the bad part. The workers of the ex-communist world—the ones who chose Western-style liberalism—were more perceptive than we, in that respect.

As for the East Bloc workers who have slid, instead, into an ugly nationalism or a new life in organized crime—those people have only demonstrated how badly communism prepared its citizens for any future life in the open air of freedom.

What do these thoughts imply today? I have come to think that, for many of us, our own socialist traditions, as conventionally understood, do us more harm than good, right now. We modern leftists have ended up resembling the people Marx mocked in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*—we, the befuddled citizens of 1999, dressed in the costumes of 1848, or of Roosevelt's New Deal, or of Sweden's social democracy, or of America's identity movements from the 1960s, or, silliest of all, in the medieval robes of feudal backwaters like Chiapas, Mexico.

I am anti-orthodox today. Anyone on the left who stands up and advocates some liberal new departure from yesterday's certainties has my vote. Well, nearly anyone. Universally despised phrases like "the third way" sound bracing and attractive, in my ears, because, at least, they imply a turn against the assumptions of the past. A turn in what direction, though?

Every new left-wing discussion from now on should begin with that question. We should ask ourselves, How have we changed? What do we actively support today that would have provoked our indignation yesterday? Which of our old assumptions were flat-out wrong? We should put our entire emphasis on one point only: on what is new and fresh in our thinking. ●

Paul Berman is a fellow at the Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.

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Mitchell Cohen

TEN YEARS AGO I was quite unsure as to what would happen in the communist bloc. I certainly did not predict how vast the transformation would be. I did believe that it was a moment of contingencies and possibilities.

I can make these statements only because I did not (and do not) think like the conservative cold warriors. Recall Jeane Kirkpatrick's claim—made half a decade before Gorbachev's rise and just as Deng's reforms were beginning—that since communist regimes remade every nook, cranny, and brain cell in their societies, change could never emerge from within them. Such "tough-mindedness" provided the intellectual justification for a great deal of foreign policy in the Reagan era. But Kirkpatrick had simply taken a (sometimes useful) conceptual tool, the ideal-type of totalitarianism, and declared it to be reality. Alas, reality changed, even though it was not supposed to do so. So 1989 marked the end of Jeane Kirkpatrick's ideology.

"Tough-mindedness" also led many conservatives to advocate economic "shock therapy" for postcommunist lands. These same folks had long argued against anything anywhere that might be called "radical" (especially if the aim was some sort of social redress). Societies are complex tissues, they warned. Rend them and unintended consequences, apparently always bad, will follow. Yet now our conservatives were proponents of radical measures rather than measured reforms. If social pain accompanied these measures, well, sufferers were told to bear it for the sake of the long term—a formula curiously like that once used by communists to rationalize their policies. Why have things gone so badly in some places—like Russia? Our conservatives have an obvious answer: the Kremlin did not go far or fast enough in the 1990s. As a famous reactionary once put it, you can't make an omelet without breaking the eggs.

Not all conservatives believed postcommunist history needed a push. If history achieved its telos with communism's fall, no nudge was needed, not to mention imagination. Jeane Kirkpatrick proposed before 1989 that totalitarianism precluded the emergence of alternatives from within communist societies; Francis Fukuyama submitted after 1989 that the triumph of "the Western Idea" (his own, actually) precluded alternative thinking in general. If Kirkpatrick took an ideal-type for reality, Fukuyama took immediate events for Eternal Historical Reason. *Memo to devotees of such theories:* European communism collapsed but China's communists have remained in power, remaking their country so radically that its society and economy are today unrecognizable by Maoist standards. And unless you really do believe in historical necessity—and that Boris Yeltsin incarnates the Western Idea—then you must admit that alternative possibilities (some positive, some awful) might also have materialized in Europe. Nineteen-eighty-nine and 1990 were not contingency-free years.

I hoped then that communism would end in Eastern and Central Europe and that a rebirth of social democracy would ensue. I hoped for the emergence of an inventive democratic left, liberated from the Leninist albatross, freed from the (spurious) identification of social egalitarianism with corrupt notions like "democratic dictatorship." Such was my hope, but I wasn't all that hopeful. This was partly due to my experiences covering the events of 1989-1990 for *Dissent*. In Hungary, for instance, I watched a reborn Social Democratic Party self-destruct with embarrassing rapidity. I listened to some of the country's bravest opposition intellectuals—often members of the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats—sound like Bolshevik apostles of Milton Friedman. "Pretend I'm a worker in a Budapest factory, not a professor from New York," I asked one of them, "Explain why I should back your plans for radical marketization." The answer: one must sometimes suffer in the short term for the sake of the long run.

Glorious as 1989 was, the revolutions against communism were "revolutions without imagination," as another dissident intellectual commented to me in 1990. In fact, these revo-

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lutions had two dimensions. First, there was the dismantling of one-party police states. Imagination aside, it was exhilarating to watch them fall. The second dimension was the will to imitation—mostly of capitalism's consumer culture. Hardly inspiring, but not so surprising given Eastern bloc living conditions and Western enticements. Anyone bludgeoned by an ideology for a half century is apt to embrace its opposite.

I recognized all this a decade ago but failed to make an essential connection. Why should there have been social democratic imagination in the East when there had been so little in the West? Beginning in the 1970s global economic and technological transformations posed weighty challenges to left-wing thinking in general. Regrettably, the left did not rise to them in compelling ways. One part of today's left, the "third wayers," talks only of "adjusting" to these changes, while another part rails against them without offering programmatic alternatives. In this era of globalizing capitalism, the left's situation brings to mind a remark I heard in June 1989 (again in Budapest), when it was clear that big events were afoot, but their consequences very uncertain: "We are moving and thinking in a dark room and we don't know where the walls are. We know we want to go out, but we don't know exactly where the door is." Portals from communism were, happily, found. Whether or not the left can find open horizons is still an open question. ●

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Nancy Fraser

IN 1990 I spoke at a Chicago teach-in about the possibility that something genuinely new and emancipatory might emerge from the wreck of Soviet communism. I explained that the democratic deficits and economic failures of that social system in no way discredited the idea of democratic socialism. And I stressed that while East and Central Europeans would doubtless incorporate some Western legal and political forms as they reconstructed their societies, we in the capitalist world had much to learn from them as well. I suggested, in short, that the collapse of communism presented a historic opportunity to design a "third way."

The subsequent hijacking of that phrase by Tony Blair sums up a decade's worth of unfulfilled expectations. Far from opening the way for innovative projects aimed at combining markets with egalitarian redistribution, social planning with democratic control, the Soviet collapse led at its best to the consolidation of liberal democracies in Central Europe. At its worst it brought casino capitalism and Mafia-style politics to Russia, and fascism and "ethnic cleansing" to the Balkans. In Western Europe and North America, meanwhile, no intimations of democratic socialism appeared. On the contrary, the demise of communism seemed only to speed the process of neoliberal globalization, now operating largely under nominally social democratic auspices.

However initially disappointing, the outcomes in East-Central Europe seem understandable in hindsight. In 1990 I had not adequately reckoned with the authoritarian structures and ethnochauvinist traditions that have impeded liberal efforts to democratize the region at least since the French Revolution. Nor had I fully grasped the traumatizing effects of communism—in destroying civil society, deforming political culture, and discrediting the socialist project. Given such historic burdens, it was naive to expect an easy transition out of communism, let alone one to democratic socialism.

What remains far less comprehensible, however, and therefore still bitterly disappointing, is the collapse of the socialist project in the West. To be sure, that project needed a thorough reformulation. It had long been clear that socialism could only be conceived as a radicalization, not a repudiation, of liberal democracy, grounded on the priority of civil liberties, toleration, and democratic forms of public culture. In addition, socialism would

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have had to jettison longstanding habits of class essentialism and economism so as to encompass the breadth of postindustrial political life, accommodating the full panoply of collective subjects (not just "workers" but also women, gays and lesbians, indigenous peoples, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities) and the rich plurality of political arenas (not just labor but also ecology, sexuality, media, violence, reproduction, multiculturalism). Finally, it would have been necessary to overcome socialism's historic fixation on the state, looking instead to non-state forms of collective ownership and to the associative capacities of civil society, while also responding to transnational processes that are currently destabilizing the framework of the nation-state.

REFORMULATING socialism was clearly no easy task. Yet unexpectedly rid of the Soviet albatross, Western leftists might have found the moment propitious. After all, the demise of communism coincided with the beginnings of the breakdown of the conservative political hegemony that had gripped Western Europe and North America throughout the 1980s. In civil society, meanwhile, an impressive array of progressive movements was expressing the diversity and complexity of life under postindustrial capitalism. Rejecting economism and *étatism*, while seeking to democratize culture and everyday life, their projects could have been seen to dovetail with a reformulated democratic socialism. In the early nineties, moreover, progressive postindustrial actors spoke increasingly of "coalition politics" and "radical democracy," as if hungry for some larger vision around which to coalesce. A reformulated democratic socialism might have provided that vision.

What happened, alas, was nothing of the sort. Far from serving to reformulate the socialist idea, postindustrial movement politics effectively displaced it. For me, accordingly, the greatest disappointment of the preceding decade was the fading away of an entire grammar of social conflict. The socialist worldview, centered on the reorganization of labor and the redistribution of wealth, ceased to supply the terms of political contestation—not only in East-Central Europe but throughout the world. In its place appeared a "postsocialist" worldview, centered on claims for the recognition of difference. To be sure, some proponents of "recognition" remain interested in economic organization. But the general tendency of the time is less to bring the two political currents together than to repress the socialist tradition altogether.

Socialism, however, cannot be so easily repressed. For one thing, recognition conflicts are proliferating at precisely the moment when an aggressively globalizing capitalism is increasingly marketizing social relations and exacerbating economic inequality. For another, they respond to processes of cultural hybridization propelled by accelerated migration and global media flows. Thus, recognition struggles can neither be understood nor resolved in isolation from political economy. Nevertheless, I reject the suggestion of some left colleagues that one should wash one's hands of "identity politics." To jettison the politics of recognition *tout court* would be to resurrect the economism and narrow class-based vision of politics that postindustrial capitalism has itself rendered obsolete. It would be also to ignore, and thus to reproduce, socialism's historic presumption of monoculturalism and hence its complicity with the communitarianism of the majority.

For me, accordingly, the principal lesson of postcommunism is the need to retrieve and update what remains unsurpassable in the socialist vision. As I see it, the task is to integrate the emancipatory kernel of that vision with the historic advances of liberal democracy, on the one hand, and those of an emerging "politics of recognition," on the other. Having (belatedly) learned that liberalism was not really "presocialist," we need now to appreciate that multiculturalism is not really "postsocialist." Only then will it be possible to learn from the past while also remaining open to the future. ●

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Agnès Heller

I HAVE NEVER been a disinterested observer of Central and East European politics. I grew up in Hungary and lived there until I was almost fifty. In only two of those years was there a political order that resembled democracy. Mainly, I lived under semi-totalitarian and totalitarian political systems in a semi-independent country under the shadow and the command of mightier neighbors and occupiers. First there was Hitler's Germany, then Stalin's Soviet Union, followed by Brezhnev's. It is easy for me to summarize my single greatest political desire: that Hungary and its neighbors finally become "normal" modern states. By normal I mean democratic, with political systems that rest on the rule of law, equality before the law, free parliamentary elections with multiparty competition, and the protection of human rights and the rights of citizens.

Many years ago, Ferenc Fehér and I carefully examined Soviet-type societies in our book *Dictatorship over Needs,* and became certain that they would collapse. Yet we had no idea when and how. Contrary to many Western friends, we didn't believe Soviet systems could be reformed. If by some miracle these dictatorships disintegrated, we thought radical changes would follow, in both economic and political spheres. We concluded that the idea of a socialist market is humbug. And of course a "democratic" single-party state is like a square circle.

We had no confidence that radical change would happen in our lifetimes. When it did, we rejoiced, as if it were a wedding day. After a wedding day comes the marriage itself, and no marriage retains all the enchantment of the honeymoon. Conflicts, sometimes serious ones, are inevitable, as are disappointments. But the marriage can still be good and, in the last instance, happy.

It is easy for me not to be disappointed. After I left Hungary in 1977, I reached a conclusion like Churchill's: democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. I had plenty of opportunities to see the dark side of modernity, including the dark sides of capitalist economies. But I still wanted my country and its neighbors to become "normal"—that is, to share the injustices of the modern world, and allow citizens the opportunity to oppose injustices overtly. This has now developed in much of Central and Eastern Europe.

Those who promised a rose garden in 1989, and those who believed in such promises, are disappointed today. Some people swore that in one stroke Hungary would become as rich (and perhaps as boring) as Austria. I never believed this, and expected difficulties instead. Some of those difficulties have come about and are indeed intolerable, such as the impoverishment of the lower middle classes or the hopeless situation of men and women whose skills are no longer wanted.

POLITICALLY, however, my hopes have been realized. Central European states have now functioned democratically for a decade, with all the attendant quarrels and conflicts. Even Slovakia and Romania have now taken a turn toward democracy. What about Russia? I was almost certain that as communism collapsed, a "rightist" dictatorship would follow the "leftist" one. I was also almost sure that Russia would not allow the Soviet Union to disband and that civil war would result. But there was no civil war of any magnitude. And what is happening now? Last spring, for the first time in Russian history, we watched an impeachment procedure against the head of state. This was an extraordinary event in Russian quarters, and lends support to an optimistic scenario in the long run. In the meantime, the most dangerous part of Europe became the country where no radical, systemic change occurred—Yugoslavia.

In 1989 I hoped for the emergence of movements calling for self-management and self-determination, movements that made their strongest showing during the Hungarian revolution of 1956. This didn't happen. I remain disappointed that such movements lacked popular support. Some withered and some, unfortunately, moved to the extreme right. (Something similar happened to Solidar-

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ity in Poland.)

My political ideas have not changed during these past ten years (some of them changed earlier). But they have entirely different implications. As long as I lived in communist Hungary I could not voice my political ideas; while living in Australia and in the United States I could speak out but I couldn't be a political participant. Now I finally have the opportunity both to speak and to act as a citizen of my country. Of course, my voice is just one among many. Often it is a voice of dissent. But this is just what I dreamed about for almost sixty years—to be able to voice dissent or consent in the media of my own country, as an independent intellectual. ●

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Adam Michnik

ANY GREAT social change unleashes great expectations. And therefore, of course, it leads to great disappointments. In 1989, a variety of individuals and social groups pinned their varied hopes to a change of political systems. For some it meant the coming of freedom—for intellectuals and trade unions, for religion, and for the nation as a whole—after many decades of subjugation. This is why many can say that at least some of their dreams have been realized. I myself belong to those who subscribe to the thesis that the decade of the nineties has been marked by the most magnificent changes to have taken place in the course of the last three hundred years of Polish history. From a dictatorship, Poland has turned into a democratic country; from a satellite into a sovereign state; from a lawless state into a state of law; from an economy of shortages into an economy of markets and growth. At the same time, Poland has managed to maintain political stability, to improve its image and its position in the world, and, finally, to enter NATO, making our country—which had lived for a century in the whirlwind of history—a safer place.

How was this possible? In the first place, the international constellation was favorable to us. The great changes taking place in the Soviet empire, correctly associated with the name of Mikhail Gorbachev and his perestroika, opened room for maneuver in the satellite countries. The policy of the United States, inspired by President Jimmy Carter's philosophy of human rights, made it possible to push the Soviet empire into a position of axiological defense; President Reagan's description of the "Evil Empire" gave strength and courage to the people fighting for freedom against communist dictatorships.

Communism lost because it had exhausted its capacity for development, while at the same time being unable to build mechanisms for self-correction. Of decisive significance, of course, was the fight against dictatorship, led by dissidents like Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Vaclav Havel and János Kis, Lech Wałęsa and Jacek Kuroń, and paid for through years of suffering and repression. And then later on, at least in Poland, a major contributing factor was a capacity to compromise that characterized the people of the anticommunist opposition as well as a part of the Communist Party.

One cannot overestimate the importance of the Round Table compromise, which took place in the first months of 1989. The aim of the Round Table was to assure stability for the period of transformation. This is why the ruling powers consented to a fully democratic election to the Senate and why the opposition, in return, agreed to reserve 65 percent of the seats in Parliament for people of the old regime. The election to the Senate brought an overwhelming victory for the Solidarity camp, whose candidates won ninety-nine out of a hundred seats. This delegitimized communist rule and opened the way for the first noncommunist government in the Soviet bloc. At the root of the Round Table compromise lay the weakness of a government that was not in a position to annihilate the opposition, but also

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the weakness of an opposition that was not in a position to overthrow the government. This principle of compromise, though it was violated many times, has nevertheless become a durable element of Polish political life.

Able to choose from various forms of anticommunism, Poland has chosen anticommunism with a human face, rather than a vengeful anticommunism with a Bolshevik face. In this sense the Polish path became one of reconciliation and not one of reconquest. At the same time, the Polish postcommunists accepted the democratic rules of the game and became active participants in politics. This differentiates Poland from, for example, Milosevic's Serbia, Tudjman's Croatia, or Lukashenko's Belarus. In all those countries we are dealing with dictatorial rule by the governing party—not democracy but "demokratura" (democracy plus *nomenklatura*).

NOT LONG AGO I took part in a public discussion in Vienna with President Havel of the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Orbán of Hungary, and Chancellor Klima of Austria. The subject of the discussion was an evaluation of the past decade. I spoke from the perspective of the head of a big daily newspaper that started from zero in 1989 and today is valued on the London Stock Exchange at U.S. $800,000,000. I said that our daily is proof that one can achieve enormous business success through honest means, while still defending humanistic values. I also talked about taking part in a ceremony launching the construction of a new *Gazeta Wyborcza* printing house in a suburb of Warsaw, Białołęka. In that very suburb, a few hundred meters away, stands the well-known prison where leaders of the Solidarity movement were incarcerated in December 1981. If someone then had predicted that eighteen years later I would be opening a modern printing house for a huge and wealthy newspaper, I would have taken it as a joke, just a bit of gallows humor. But that little coincidence is perhaps not a bad illustration of the enormous change that has taken place in Poland.

In spite of all that, we cannot help feeling tormented by a crucial disproportion between the magnitude of the changes and the plight of those people who have not benefited from them. Among those who have not benefited are the workers from the huge factories, the old Solidarity strongholds who, through their strikes, forced concessions on behalf of freedom, and now find unemployment staring them in the face. This is because the very factories that produced such courageous freedom fighters were, at the same time, museum pieces from an already anachronistic communist economy.

Let us imagine a factory that produced busts of Lenin. In those days there was a big market for such busts. Every director of an enterprise or secretary of a local Party organization had to have such a bust on his desk. In 1989 the demand for Lenin's bust disappeared. The factory faced bankruptcy. The workers employed there had a right to feel wronged. After all, they had not worked any less hard; there was simply no work for them. So this is one of the paradoxes of the transformation: economic rationality may have a painful impact on working people. The movement to emancipate the labor force led to the effective blossoming of private entrepreneurship. And the idea of worker self-government—an effective instrument in the struggle against the communist *nomenklatura*—turned out to be completely useless under the conditions of a market economy.

IN 1989, only a few people foresaw the precipitous collapse of the Soviet empire. I was not one of them. I expected gradual changes, an evolutionary expansion of the field of freedom. The disintegration of the Soviet empire changed the geopolitics of Central Europe. Let's take a look at Poland. Until 1989, Poland had three neighbors: the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic. Today, none of those states exists any more. At the same time, the breakup of the Soviet empire has revived nationalist tendencies. One has to admit that Poland has managed to establish decent relations both with its own national minorities and with the neighboring countries that have Polish minorities. For the first time in its history, Poland does not have any ethnic conflicts. These circumstances, as well as the consensus of ma-

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jor political forces concerning foreign policy, have resulted in Poland finding itself among the new members of NATO.

The revolution of 1989 was a great change without a great utopia. There are problems that the transformation has not resolved effectively. Privatization has not been fully accomplished. The restructuring of the mining and steel industries has not yet happened. Poland's agricultural structure is still anachronistic. Health reform has not yet been completed. Corruption is still a problem. The judicial system is functioning poorly. Nevertheless, the positive aspects clearly seem to outweigh all that. In Poland there was neither a breakdown of the state on the Russian scale nor a bloody war on the Balkan model. Most Polish problems are the typical troubles of modern democracies. If in spite of the frequent changes of government one can talk of a continuation of the reform process, this means that on major issues different political forces are able to agree. Poland is an independent and democratic, stable and safe country, and it is thriving. That is not a bad bottom line after one decade in a country torn apart for three hundred years by foreign forces and by its own anarchy. ●

Translated from the Polish by Elzbieta Matynia.

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Alan Ryan

BERTRAND RUSSELL was not the most successful of political prophets. If he had not died almost thirty years ago of extreme old age, he would surely have been astonished to see that humanity has not yet blown itself to bits. But he did have an acute eye for the unregenerate side of political human nature. In a sprightly little essay on "The Superior Virtue of the Oppressed," he urged his readers not to confuse the need to liberate oppressed peoples from their oppressors with the expectation that they would behave nicely when they had been liberated. On the contrary, we might think that justice demands their emancipation, but we should expect them to use their freedom to settle old scores and to perpetrate a good deal of oppression in their turn.

It was a thought Russell might himself have reached for in the last years of his life, when he waxed sentimental about the Viet Cong; but it is certainly a thought that we all have to hang on to when looking back over the last decade. Two things were obvious all along, though their impact was not predictable. The first was that the failure of Soviet communism owed a lot to the failure of the 1848 revolutions to take liberalism, constitutionalism, and economic ambition into the farther reaches of Eastern Europe. Marx was right about the way socialism would have to draw on the resources of a liberal, progressive society if it was to prosper.

The second was that nationalism was more attractive to the average citizen than socialism had ever been. Hungarian friends of mine had been taught Russian in school for ten years and swore they understood not a word; of course, socialism had been imposed by the Red Army rather than popular feeling, but whether it was its coercive origins or its Russian associations that destroyed its chances of acceptance is hard to say.

But add the two things together and there is a recipe for trouble of the sort that Russell understood. In the absence of a bedrock conviction of the merits of tolerance, the return of democracy was always likely to be more impressive as a solvent than as a binding agent; multiparty democracy without a talent for compromise and coalition building is exceedingly hard to operate. The temptation will always be either to stand on narrow principle even when this means that no stable government can be established or to use political access to make off with whatever resources the old regime has left to be looted. If you stir ethnic and nationalist passions into that situation, you will be very lucky to end with nothing worse than the infinitely sad but happily nonviolent divorce of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Like almost everyone else, I imagine, I did

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not think that Yugoslavia would bring pre-1914 Balkan infighting back to the edges of Western Europe. Although we had all abandoned our old hope that Yugoslavia might be the home of a socialist third way with real workers' participation in the management of the companies they worked for, and a sort of Marxist cooperativism as its eventual result, it was hard not to think that Yugoslavia was on the way to a cheerful embrace of the modern world, and that Tito's legacy would be the burying of old ethnic hatreds by prosperity and political common sense.

AMONG THE innumerable reasons for depression in the aftermath of the Yugoslav collapse into ethnic civil war, two strike Europeans particularly hard. The first is the way Europe's inability to act in concert on either the diplomatic or the military front reveals the shallowness of the European Union's roots. Prosperous Western Europe beckons both economic migrants and refugees from the horrors of war, but its political capacity is almost nil. For fifty years, there has been a latent military-cum-diplomatic structure in Europe in the form of the Western European Union; but when it might have been activated, it could not be. Without American leadership, Europe is incapable of making decisions on anything more demanding than the size of fruit allowed to be sold in European supermarkets.

The other reason for depression is the speed with which we all find ourselves thinking that ethnic and religious strife are "primordial," somehow built into European societies and the European psyche in a way that liberal values and cooperative inclinations cannot be. It is a mixture of intellectual idleness and political despair that the British are prone to when contemplating Northern Ireland, and just about all of Europe is prone to when contemplating the wreckage of Yugoslavia. It won't do, however. Groups do forget to hate each other, and bigotry is a bad habit societies often shake off when they have better things to do with their time.

Lest that sound too Pollyanna-ish to be tolerable, however, it is also worth observing how far the past decade has reminded Europeans of the truths that emerged from the wreckage of the French Revolution two centuries ago: prosperity is a great healer, but hard to achieve without strong, honest, regular and predictable government, which is hard to achieve unless there is enough widely diffused prosperity to encourage clever and energetic people to make their money without looting the state. It is hard to imagine Boris Yeltsin spending his evenings with the works of Benjamin Constant or Francois Guizot; but it is equally hard to imagine that he doesn't by now know what they knew then. ●

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THE EDITORS

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Ann Snitow

In the post-1989 world, intellectuals and activists are suffering from an ongoing case of surprise. No one, for example—East or West—expected the wars that came seething out of Yugoslavia. With each day's newspaper, pundits rush to reverse themselves. ("NATO can never win this war." "NATO has won this war.")

Since 1989, there have been a number of these swift, vicious wars. They are many things: trials of new alliances; parades of new weapons; reconfigurations of Western ideas of self-interest and values. Among the casualties are the conversations about possible futures that American leftists expected to have at a moment so dramatically named "the fall of communism."

What, after all, was this going to mean? "A new world order" sounded Orwellian, and "an end to ideology" jejeune. The U.S. left's formulations in response often seemed tired and inadequate. But it wasn't basic left values that were worn out. After a twenty-five-year decline in the power of the American left, it was rather left confidence about strategy that had received another blow. And our shock at the carnage was so great that we stopped thinking about our deeper disorientation.

The *International Herald Tribune* reported in January 1997 that after the Dayton agreement, a string of U.S. Treasury officials visited President Slobodan Milosevic, urging him to open up Yugoslavia to foreign investments. An increasingly hostile Milosevic finally turned on his glossy Western visitors: "Foreign money is rabbits. . . . Once it gets in the country it runs all around and you can't find out where it all ends up." Quite. No doubt Milosevic's fear of the increasing freedom of capital helped bring about the wars in Yugoslavia. If a post-1989 left doesn't like his methods for seeking control or setting boundaries, we need to find others. Though in the United States left constructions of demand, need, desire, and entitlement have always been pastiche, the forms in which the left called for social justice were based on long strings of associations and assumptions built up over a century of varied struggles. Now left demands have lost many of their directional arrows. Who is to be asked for what? Where does the buck stop when "capital is rabbits"? All the groups I know are proceeding piecemeal. We have only the sketchiest maps for post-1989 political action.

I remember tasting ashes in my mouth when I discovered that my pre-1989 political words suddenly sounded different—naive, or unmoored, or merely rhetorical—to my own ears. A new context had changed everything. The language of the left had lost its stability after the break-up of the great structuring belief systems of the cold war period.

Of course, in East and Central Europe, 1989 had a completely different feeling and meaning. The sense of an ending was submerged beneath the popular euphoria about beginnings. Even those with something to lose shared in an immensely hopeful curiosity about what might come next. In the Eastern search for new political maps the talk was about democracy, civil society, human rights, and how to join the West economically and socially.

But just as the frightening eruption of war in Yugoslavia transformed the range and tenor of political conversations in the West, so too, in the East, the romance with civil society was soon accompanied by more bitter questions arising from the wars: How will nationalism play in postcommunism? Who will be the next world policeman? When will the U.S. fight, and when will it not fight? Is Europe a fortress, and if so, who is inside?

The wars have brought East and West together in a wild surmise about the power blocs of the future. "Security" now trumps "democracy"—a shared change of emphasis. And there is that other commonality: though for historically divergent reasons, traditional left aspirations have become almost unspeakable. On both sides of the former cold war, whole dictionaries of left languages have dropped from daily use into the rare or archaic. For ex-

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ample, one British colleague who lectured about the disturbing loss of social services in the new democracies of East and Central Europe was vociferously attacked—not by the right, but by a Hungarian social democrat, who argued that these were social demands the fragile new states could never meet. Left talk was nothing but regression and self-delusion; this man wanted realpolitik. Similarly, in private, Polish colleagues worry about the collapse of government-supported social welfare, but many of them feel they cannot strike this note of complaint in public: "They'll call us communists." As one Polish activist put it, "The socialist words are tainted. We're going to need new ones."

The scene is New York on a typical day during the spring, after NATO began bombing Serbia. I receive two phone calls, both from activist friends, colleagues on the left. One asks that we rush to a certain street corner to protest the bombing; the other indicates a different street corner to support the humanitarian intervention to save the Albanian Kosovars from genocide. Each side speaks in a language that retreats to a pre-1989 predictability, describing a binary world—language that could have been used at any time in the last thirty years. Each proclaims underlying values I share.

Indeed, in both East and West, the current analytical impasse is daunting. We're all trying to think on our feet. It's a war of analogies. Is 1999 like 1936 (in which case we must rush to head off Hitler/Milosevic), or is it like 1968 (in which case the United States must get out of world power-mongering and foreign intervention and mind its own business)?

I'll propose my own analogy: 1945. There's no literal similarity, of course, since 1945 inaugurated those very rigidities of world power structure that are now (possibly) breaking down. But the degree of change, and our lack of clarity about how to name it, is parallel. So, 1945: The war is over (for the time being). There's a brief moment of celebration. Then the struggle to understand the new shape of local and world politics begins. The left faces a U.S. capitalism that is mobile, healthy, and flushed with triumph. Plenty of money is about to be spent on new weapons, a most lucrative trade. In response, a new generation begins the necessary process of critique and resistance to the terrible poverty that shadows all this plenty. (The last time, the new generation emerged only after twenty years, and because of the provocation of a new war.)

How will they do it this time around? I find I haven't lost the habit of wishing: the impulse toward political commitment finds new, indigenous forms; people everywhere experiment and cobble together an activism from the available discourses. Saskia Sassen describes how the new capital has cleverly constructed pathways for itself that escape government observation and regulation and at the same time can't be seen in daily life. In response, people try to make their own new political pathways. Though the idea of "Human Rights" is liable to cynical manipulation, its emphasis on individual responsibility adds something brilliant to traditional left thinking: individuals made the war in Yugoslavia, an idea to place alongside the left analysis that sees large structural causes underlying every important historical event. To continue wishing, is it too much to hope that the current tension between labor movements and identity politics will ease? In a worldwide economy, we have to say farewell to the hope of worker unity. Recognition of difference is the only gate to new organizing. But ecology might be one common ground: the demand that capital stop poisoning the village wells of all the world.

The social structures and the individual psychology of political participation are weak in the post-1989 world. Because in America there's very little historical memory, patience is in order. Those seeking new political identities are forced to invent everything—and nothing's harder. ●

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Who's in Charge Here?

Mark Levinson

LAST SUMMER, J. Brian Atwood, the head of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), the government agency responsible for foreign aid, announced he was stepping down. Freed from the Clinton administration's Panglossian view of the world, he delivered a warning:

> It is time to end the hypocrisy. Globalization is thus far leaving out about two-thirds of the world. . . .If economic growth is limited to an already educated elite, then it has limited development benefit and it is a poor indicator of sustainability. Reform without equity investments may satisfy the IMF, but it cannot be a recipe for long-term stability.

About the same time that Atwood spoke out, the World Bank released a report on global poverty estimating that the number of people living on less than a dollar a day had increased by two hundred million people in the 1990s. According to the United Nations the ratio of total global income going to the world's richest 20 percent compared to the world's poorest 20 percent had increased from thirty to one in 1960, to sixty to one in 1990, to seventy-four to one in 1997. The same report showed that more than eighty countries have per capita incomes lower than those of a decade or more ago. And even in the United States, although employment is up, working people are laboring longer and harder for less reward than they did two decades ago.

Speaking of hypocrisy, someday, not soon, the economics profession will answer for its unqualified and near universal support for globalization. The consensus, however, is starting to crack. In the last several years the staunchly pro-globalization Institute for International Economics published Dani Rodrik's *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?* and William Cline's *Trade and Income Distribution*. Although Rodrik and Cline are supporters of globalization, they stand out among economists for their honesty in assessing its costs and benefits. Cline's study, for example, estimated that a substantial part of the increase in wage inequality in the United States over the last twenty years has resulted from trade.

When economists actually try to measure them, gains from trade turn out to be very small. In *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?*, Rodrik concedes as much: "[N]o widely accepted model attributes to postwar trade liberalization more than a very tiny fraction of the increased prosperity of the advanced industrial countries. Yet most economists do believe that expanding trade was very important to this progress." "Faith," Jeff Faux concluded in a review of Rodrik (*Dissent*, Fall 1997), is the best word to describe economists' attachment to the principles of free trade.

In an interview (*Challenge*, March-April 1998) Rodrik returned to this theme. "[M]any trade economists have been a little more definite [about the benefits of free trade] than the range of estimates or the range of uncertainty we have warrants on this issue." The interview goes on:

> **Q.** Now, that opens a Pandora's box. Why do their public statements differ from their private comments?
>
> **A.** I do not have a good answer. I'm really quite struck by why many things that are often said and repeated and rationally discussed in the seminar room among economists are often taboo in the public arena. I think part of it has to do with the fact that free trade is such a sacrosanct subject among economists and among trade economists in particular. And I think there is a tremendous amount of concern in the profession in general, and among

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trade economists in particular, that statements that are okay in the seminar setting might be misinterpreted by the public and essentially provide ammunition to the "barbarians . . ."

Q. What bothers me a little bit is that much of the source of support for free trade seems to me to be coming from business interests that will benefit from the free trade. Is that influencing even the mainstream economics profession?

A. I'm not sure that that is what drives the mainstream economics profession. . .But you are pointing out a very interesting phenomenon. It's surprising how much of the agenda of trade negotiations has been driven by business and how much of the existing trade rules reflect the interest of business as opposed to labor or consumer or environmental interests. . . [T]here is an interesting paradox in that the whole GATT-WTO system is built on the notion that we have to avoid regulatory capture by special interest groups so that we do not slide down the slippery slope toward protectionism. Yet in practice it turns out that the agenda of trade globalization, trade expansion, and trade pacts has been captured largely by business interests.

RODRIK MAKES an obvious point, but one that is missed by many commentators on globalization. It is fashionable today to proclaim that although politicians go through the motions of national elections—offering chimerical programs and slogans—world markets, the Internet, and the furious pace of trade involve people in a global game in which elected representatives are little more than bit players. According to Thomas Friedman (a barometer of fashionable thinking on globalization), not only has globalization caused politics to lag behind economics, but, as he put it in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, "the most basic truth about globalization [is that] *no one is in charge*."

Nation-states, or at least most of them, are less powerful in the face of growing international markets. But that does not mean that no one is in charge. Globalization has been driven by the enormous political power of business and financial interests, acting through states. Global capitalism has not escaped politics or the state. The form that globalization takes, the rules of the global economy—embodied in trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement and in global institutions like the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—are determined by states. These rules determine whose interests are served and whose are not. Of course not all states have an equal say in such matters. The United States is the dominant player and has put its interest, or more precisely, the interest of its financial community, first.

The power of the United States can be seen in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis. U.S. officials had long considered the East and Southeast Asian system of protectionism, industrial policy, and activist state intervention in the economy as an arrangement that handicapped U.S. economic interests. The governments in Asia assisted Asian firms in penetrating the U.S. market while closing their economies to U.S. exports and U.S. ownership. Prior to the crisis, however, U.S. efforts to move the Asian economies in the free-market direction desired by U.S. corporations had brought meager results. Thus, a golden opportunity to push the U.S. agenda for East Asia opened up with the financial crisis.

U.S. officials did not conceal their designs. Early last year the *Financial Times* stated that "U.S. officials hinted to their domestic audience that they will use the opportunity provided by the crisis to force radical structural reform on other countries that would amount to what some critics see as an 'Americanization' of the world economy." Jeff Garten, under-secretary of commerce during Clinton's first term, said, "Most of these countries are going to go through a deep and dark tunnel . . . . But on the other end there is going to be a significantly different Asia in which Americans have achieved much deeper market penetration, much greater access." The U.S. trade representative, Charlene Barshevsky, told the U.S. Congress that the International Monetary Fund's program for Thailand, consisting of "commitments to restructure public enterprises and accelerate privatization of certain key sectors—including energy, transportation, utilities, and communication—which will enhance market-driven

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competition and deregulation [are expected] to create new business opportunities for U.S. firms."

Several months into the Asian crisis, in what practically all Asian countries then saw as an innovative response to the currency crisis, Tokyo proposed the establishment of the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF). It would have been capitalized with $100 billion from the reserves of Japan, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The AMF was conceived as a facility from which governments whose currencies were under attack could have drawn cash to counter the speculators. But the U.S. Treasury and the IMF opposed the idea on the grounds that it would weaken the ability of the IMF to "extract reforms." The AMF never got off the ground.

In the last two decades the world economy has endured at least three major crises—the debt crisis of the 1980s, the crisis in Mexico in 1994-1995, and most recently the East Asia crisis. Despite the striking evidence that freer capital movements bring about financial crises, the view that dominates policy circles is that a world of full capital mobility continues to be inevitable and desirable.

What accounts for the force of this idea? One reason is ideology. Most economists believe that markets are self-adjusting.* It follows that after the occasional speculative overshoot or "bubble" things will in due course return to normal. If this is so, it is irrational to regulate capital flows. Deregulation supposedly will lead to a more efficient allocation of capital, a greater availability of capital for productive investment and hence result in higher levels of investment and growth and enhanced stability. Of course, deregulation has done none of these things.

The more important reason for the dominance of the belief in capital mobility is that powerful interests benefit from it. Even Paul Volcker, Alan Greenspan's predecessor, recently warned, "The biggest concern today is the growing constituency for instability." The "constituency for instability" consists of the key personnel who rotate between Wall Street, the U.S. Treasury and the international financial institutions (the IMF and the World Bank). According to economist Jagdish Bhagwati, an advocate of free trade, this powerful network is unable to look beyond the interest of Wall Street—which supports a world of free capital mobility because it only enlarges the arena in which to make money—which it equates with the good of the world.

Last March, in a statement that only someone with advanced training in economics could make, IMF managing director Michel Camdessus told the Institute of International Bankers: "To optimize the opportunities and reduce the risks of globalization, we must head towards a world with open and integrated capital markets." This, of course, was after "open and integrated capital markets" caused the financial crisis in Asia, the biggest financial crisis in the last half century.

As I write, Asia's stockmarkets are soaring again. The financial press is full of stories about Asia's economic recovery. But it is eerily reminiscent of what caused the crisis in the first place: foreign money is pouring in, buying promising stocks and high-interest bonds. If we've learned anything in the last two years it is that money flowing in now can just as easily move out tomorrow.

One might expect that two years after the outbreak of the Asian financial crisis, there would be institutions in place to prevent a repeat of the massive and rapid exit of $100 billion that triggered the collapse of the region's economies. But for all the talk about creating "a new global financial architecture," very little has changed.

That is not because no one is in charge. Quite the contrary. ●

*Keynes, who opposed this idea, explained: "The strength of the self-adjusting school depends on its having behind it almost the whole body of organized economic thinking and doctrine of the last hundred years. This is a formidable power. It is the product of acute minds and has persuaded and convinced the great majority of intelligent and disinterested persons who have studied it. It has vast prestige and a more far-reaching influence than is obvious. For it lies behind the education and habitual modes of thought, not only of economists, but of bankers and businessmen and civil servants and politicians of all parties."

Mark Levinson is the chief economist at the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE).

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Israel '99: The Three Coalitions

Michael Walzer

I FIRMLY BELIEVE that even Israelis who voted for Benjamin Natanyahu were relieved by Ehud Barak's victory last May 17. It was as if the whole country had been in a state of anxiety and depression, and now its mood suddenly lifted. One could feel the difference on the streets, in shops and cafes, on the phone with friends and casual acquaintances. The years of meanness and deception, of incitement and division, which began with Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995, were finally over. The end was symbolically enacted when, late on election night, Barak went to the Tel Aviv square where Rabin had been shot and told the thousands of (mostly) young people gathered there: "I will walk in his path."

In the months since, it has become clear that the great victory was partial and incomplete. The nature of the incompleteness is worth examining; it may not be a feature only of Israeli politics. The fruits of political victory these days are very hard to reap. Because of the decline of political parties, which brings with it the virtual disappearance of loyalty and discipline in democratic politics, winning an election doesn't mean that one can enact a program (assuming that one has a program).

The decline of Israel's Labor Party is quite extraordinary. When Rabin won the 1992 elections, Labor controlled 44 seats in the 120-member Knesset (with its left ally Meretz, it controlled 56); defeated in 1996, Labor's total dropped to 34; in this year of victory, it dropped again to 26 (with Meretz, 36). This is in large part, but not solely, the result of the new electoral law that makes it possible to vote separately for prime minister and for Knesset representatives. Israelis were able to divide their votes, choosing Barak, say, and then looking for sectional (ethnic, national, or religious) representation. As a result, there are more parties in the Knesset than ever before; Barak's coalition starts with Labor but ends six parties later.

It isn't a bad coalition, as such things go in Israeli politics, but it had to be designed for a purpose that is considerably more limited than Labor's election program. This is the peace process coalition. It rests on the assumption—entirely right, I think—that peace is the first priority of Israeli politics. Had Barak chosen to put constitutional (religion/state) questions first, as some of his supporters wanted him to do, he would have needed a very different coalition. Many ultra-orthodox Jews will support the peace process, but are determined opponents of liberal constitutionalism; while many supporters of religious freedom and even of disestablishment are hawkish on territorial questions. A constitutionalist coalition could readily include significant sections of the secular right, but it would have to exclude the religious parties, without which it would be very difficult to make peace.

A third coalition, harder to put together than either of the first two, would be necessary to push the social-democratic agenda of the Labor party. The Party's commitments to reduce unemployment and open new educational opportunities to the poorest Israelis figured more significantly in the campaign than they are likely to figure in the campaign's aftermath. No doubt, Labor won some votes on these issues, but the votes it should have won, the traditional working class votes that once provided its political base, went elsewhere—to right-wing populist or ethnic-religious parties. Arab votes went mostly to three different Arab parties—all of which could be part of a possible social-democratic coalition. (The Arabs will also support the peace process, though only from outside the government, since the

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religious parties won't sit with them inside. They would probably disagree among themselves on constitutional questions.)

Once upon a time, all the projects of the Labor Party would have been funded, so to speak, from its working-class base; now its actual base is middle class and provides, at best, only qualified support for the core social-democratic program. The peace coalition that Barak has put together includes neoliberals and free marketeers (some of them inside the Labor Party) and probably can't do without them; and it also includes sectional parties, like the Russians and the Orthodox, who support welfare and educational programs, but only for their own people; they have little interest, so it seems, in the general welfare.

POLITICS ALWAYS has its priorities, and for the Israeli left peace has long had the special priority that revolution once had for the international left. First we have to make peace, leftist politicians and intellectuals have been saying for years, and then we will worry about growing inequality, or discrimination against Arab citizens, or women's rights, or religious coercion, or environmental degradation, or...the list is long and getting longer. But at least one imagined a strong Labor Party dealing with these different things, one after another, even if it would have to look for different allies in each case. Now the party is only one element in the necessary coalitions; it's the leading element only by a bare plurality, and hardly able to take a strong lead.

What this means is that the coalition that makes peace may also make the constitutional and distributive issues harder to deal with than they would be if they were dealt with now by a different coalition. No doubt, this is a common problem in political life; I only want to suggest that as parties get weaker (in Israel and also in the West generally), the problem gets more and more difficult to cope with. Israel's new electoral system, and the identity politics that it fosters, has so radically weakened the main parties (Likud, the leading party of the right, dropped from 33 seats to 19 last May) that the difficulties are particularly vivid. The general truth is that not all good causes attract the same people. The particular truth is that Israel today needs a different coalition for every issue, and the success of any given coalition is sure to require concessions to each of the partners that will make the work of the next one, with a different set of partners, much more difficult.

So if Barak succeeds in reaching peace agreements with the Palestinians and the Syrians, leftist supporters of economic redistribution or religious disestablishment are likely to find that their cause has not been advanced; it may even have been set back. Barak's path will be as difficult for him to walk as it was for Rabin; there will be roadblocks and detours along the way. And precisely because the goal is so important, the demands of Labor's partners will be extortionist, and some of them, at least, will be conceded. Given the partners, this is a high price to pay. And yet, and yet, as Israelis overwhelmingly know, the value of peace is even higher.

I imagine the treaties being signed sometime after Barak's promised fifteen months and sometime before the revolution. After that, the citizens of Israel will find a way to deal with... everything else. ●

MICHAEL WALZER is co-editor of *Dissent*. He was in Israel in the first half of 1999.

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The Trial of Ocalan

Aliza Marcus

THE DEFENDANT, sitting in a bullet-proofed glass box, rambled on about the historic closeness of Turks and Kurds and the need to recognize Turkey's vibrant, if somewhat flawed, democracy. His lawyers said little—their request to call witnesses was denied by the judges. One day the defense team did not even bother to show up. The prosecuting attorneys rarely asked questions of the defendant. This was left for the families of the "martyrs," Turkish soldiers killed fighting rebels from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). A few dozen relatives were brought in every day to observe the trial and, when they felt like it, shout abuse at the defendent. Some of them would drape themselves in a Turkish flag before standing up and screaming.

"I am sorry," said Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, after a woman blamed him for the death of her soldier husband. "I understand your pain." Kurds waited for him to continue, but he said nothing else. Ocalan, who is responsible for leading the biggest Kurdish rebellion in Turkey's history, did not bother to add that Kurdish families are also grieving. In fact, during the nine-day trial held in June on the island prison in the Sea of Marmara, he rarely mentioned what led Kurds to support the PKK.

In a desperate attempt to save his own life, the man whose fifteen-year battle is credited with raising Kurdish consciousness in Turkey and abroad, gave up the fight. He spoke of how Kurds and Turks fought together for Turkey's independence, he commended Turkey's democracy, he accused the Kurds of being feudal and backward. Every so often he reminded the court that Kurds did have grievances, but he did not articulate them. When asked whether the government was unjust to the Kurds, he was hard-pressed to come up with anything stronger than limitations on the use of the Kurdish language.

The judges were clearly impressed with Ocalan's speech. In their verdict—guilty of treason, sentenced to hang—they often quoted from Ocalan's defense statement. They had no arguments with what he said. Rather, they quoted him to prove the main point of the judgment: that there is not a Kurdish problem in Turkey, just a problem of terrorism.

MANY KURDS in Turkey were stunned by Ocalan's statements. The fifty-one-year-old guerrilla chief was kicked out of Syria last year and spent about five months desperately seeking asylum in Europe. Turned down everywhere, he took refuge in the Greek Embassy in Kenya. When Turkish commandos tracked him down and brought him back to Turkey, Kurds demonstrated angrily all over the world. Even Kurdish critics of Ocalan—people opposed to violence or to his dictatorial leadership—thought Turkey would try to discredit the Kurdish cause by staging a humiliating trial of the man who had dedicated his life for the fight for Kurdish independence. The first person to sign up as Ocalan's lawyer was Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu, a well-known Kurdish critic of Ocalan and his methods.

"It is all Kurds who will be judged, so I believe I have no choice but to defend him," Okcuoglu told me after Ocalan was brought to Turkey. But a few days before the trial started, Okcuoglu withdrew from the case. He had expected the rebel chief to make a political defense, stating the Kurds' demands and drawing attention to the problems they have faced in Turkey. When he learned that Ocalan was going to do little more than apologize, he resigned. Many Kurds—mainly Ocalan's longtime critics—believe Ocalan wanted to save

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his own life and thought he could do so by saying that the PKK's battle should have ended years ago and that he is ready to serve the democratic Turkish republic. "He begs for his life," screamed Turkish newspapers, which had dubbed him "babykiller." Turkish interrogators likely promised Ocalan that a soft courtroom defense would not just keep him from the gallows, but would ease the way for Ankara to extend some rights to the Kurds.

But if the rebel leader believed Turkey, then he is more naïve than one would expect. After all, Turkey has a history of dealing with Kurdish rebellions. Take the first major uprising, which broke out in 1925, three years after the republic was founded. Kurdish leader Sheik Said was captured within two months and tried for treason. But Turkish officials were worried that a fiery speech in court might encourage other Kurds to revolt. Before the trial, a judge came to the prison and suggested a deal. If Sheik Said would tell the court he was fighting for a return to an Islamic state, his life would be spared. He would get the death penalty, but on appeal the sentence would be commuted to life imprisonment. Sheik Said agreed. The court, as expected, sentenced him to death. Then it announced there would be no appeal and the sentence would be carried out immediately.

That night, as Sheik Said was taken to be hanged, he saw the judge who had persuaded him to alter his testimony.

"Didn't we have an agreement?" he asked.

The judge sneered. "Even the sentence you got was short for all the blood you spilled."

And thus ended the first Kurdish uprising. Sheik Said was hanged on June 29, 1925. Seventy-four years later to the day, Ocalan was sentenced to death.

Some Turkish and Kurdish analysts were hopeful that Ankara would make changes after Ocalan was captured. With the PKK leader in prison and the group in disarray, it seems a perfect time for Turkey to seize the initiative and prove itself a country of all its citizens. Some columnists called for Turkey to ease restrictions on Kurdish identity, arguing this would finish off the PKK for good. After all, Turkish officials have long claimed they could not address Kurdish demands for cultural and linguistic rights while battling Kurdish rebels. But Ankara has so far failed to translate the capture of Ocalan into anything more than a slap to the face of Kurds. The hopeful comments and analyses made in the early days of Ocalan's capture have given way to resignation on the part of those seeking reform.

It's not that Turkey does not admit there are Kurds—or that it has a problem. It just cannot put the two words together and admit there is something called a Kurdish problem. And the situation is getting worse. The government is a coalition between Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's nationalist Democratic Left Party (DSP) and the ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The planned amnesty for Kurdish rebels could not even make it through Parliament because of MHP opposition. This does not bode well for reforms that would give Kurds the right to study Kurdish in school or use it in television broadcasts. Nor does this government appear inclined to stop torture by police, change laws that limit freedom of expression, or investigate the mysterious killings of Kurdish and Turkish activists.

NEVERTHELESS, there have been changes over the years in Turkey's treatment of the Kurds, about twelve to fifteen million of the country's sixty-five million people. Kurdish-language novels and Kurdish music cassettes are freely available. The pro-Kurdish HADEP party is always in danger of being shut down by the court, but it successfully fielded candidates for mayoralties in the southeast in the April general elections.

Most Kurds admit that they have a lot more room to maneuver than they had twenty years ago, when moderate Kurdish politician Serafettin Elci was jailed for announcing in Parliament, "I am a Kurd and there are Kurds in Turkey." But expressions of Kurdish identity are still severely limited by laws that ban criticizing the military, "inciting hatred," and spreading "separatist propaganda"—laws that can be used against people who write about Kurdish history, criticize Turkey's human rights record, or use the word "Kurdistan" in a poem.

By way of example, the following has happened since Ocalan was captured: a pro-

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Kurdish party founded by Elci, who is an outspoken critic of the PKK, was shut down by the court for "separatism" (the party's platform called for Kurdish minority rights). Akin Birdal, the head of the independent Human Rights Association, was jailed for four months because of a speech in which he called for a peaceful solution to the war. Oral Calislar, a journalist, was sentenced to thirteen months imprisonment for publishing an interview with Ocalan. A compilation of interviews with soldiers who fought against the PKK was banned and the writer, Nadire Mater, faces up to six years in jail if charged with and convicted of insulting the military.

THE TRUTH is that Kurds are weary of the war. Some twenty thousand rebels have died, along with five thousand Turkish soldiers and five thousand civilians. Thousands of villages in the southeast lie abandoned, many forcibly emptied by Turkish soldiers trying to deny the PKK food, shelter, and new recruits. Kurdish journalists have been killed, politicians imprisoned, intellectuals driven into exile. One reason the PKK has been able to establish its dominance among Kurds—and it is the dominant Kurdish organization in Turkey—is the lack of alternatives: with democratic routes for dissent closed down by the state, taking up arms sometimes seems the only way to fight. Most Kurds would like nothing better than a deal with Ankara that would recognize minority rights—such as Kurdish-language education and broadcasting and recognition of their unique cultural heritage—along with democratization that would benefit all of Turkey's citizens. This would solve their problems, and along the way the PKK would probably wither into irrelevance.

But Ocalan does not want to be bypassed. From his prison cell he is trying to maintain control over the PKK. The task is made easier by the prison's military guards, who allow Ocalan to pass messages via his lawyers. The rebel leader's pronouncements so far have pleased Turkey. Ocalan called a unilateral cease-fire after the trial and promised that the rebels would withdraw from Turkish territory. Brother Osman Ocalan, a high-ranking PKK member, later announced an end to the armed struggle, saying the rebels would turn to the political arena. But it is still unclear what spurred the weakened but by no means beaten guerrilla force to give up the fight. Was this a calculated challenge to official statements that there could be no policy reforms while Turkey faced a problem of terrorism? Did someone whisper something hopeful into Ocalan's ear? It may not matter. Turkey would be wise to keep in mind brother Osman's addenda: PKK rebels will fight if attacked, and, if Turkey does not offer a real political solution, another rebellion is certain to break out. The next move is up to Turkey, but will it take advantage of this opening?

It is often said that Turkey does not respond well to pressure. But neither does it make changes in the absence of pressure. Some people hope the European Union (EU) can push Ankara to democratize. Turkey was offended by the EU's decision two years ago not to even list Turkey as a candidate for membership, at the same time that East European states were given a timetable for membership. Many liberals believe this was when Turkey further slowed its already slow move toward democracy. The EU has another chance at its Helsinki meeting in December.

Turkey desperately wants EU membership. Although it is hardly ready—its economy is too weak, its democracy too flawed—not all East European candidates are ready either. Like those countries, Turkey needs a timetable and a list of changes it must make to be accepted. It does not need vague demands that it respect human rights—certainly not from Germany, which was so afraid of the PKK that it revoked its international warrant for Ocalan's arrest rather than have to deal with him, nor from Athens, whose diplomats harbored Ocalan in Kenya. The EU must deal with Turkey seriously, which means pointing out the specific changes that need to be made and giving it a deadline. This, combined with the capture of Ocalan, may convince Turkey's military and political leaders it is time for change.

A few years after Sheik Said was hanged, another rebellion broke out, and then another and another. By the 1940s Turkey had sent enough Kurds into internal exile that quiet

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reigned in the southeast. In the 1960s, though, Kurdish intellectuals regrouped, and in the 1970s Ocalan founded the PKK. No matter what happens to the rebel leader, the Kurdish problem will remain as long as Ankara denies Kurds their identity and practices a selective democracy. Ankara does not need to negotiate with Ocalan or the PKK. It needs to respect human rights, get the military out of politics, and allow the Kurds the freedom to be Kurds. ●

ALIZA MARCUS is a freelance journalist based in Israel. She won the National Press Club's Freedom of the Press Award for her reporting from Turkey.

The National Labor Committee & People of Faith Network Ask You to

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An open letter to President Clinton & The World Trade Organization

We are not opposed to global trade, but believe very strongly that respect for human rights is a necessary condition for fair trade.

We do not believe that working people around the world should be pitted against each other in a race to the bottom over who will accept the lowest wages and benefits and the most miserable living and working conditions.

No corporation or country should gain competitive advantage through exploiting child labor, paying starvation wages, forcing 16-hour work shifts, firing pregnant women, repressing all human and worker rights, and operating factories hidden behind locked metal gates, barbed-wire and armed guards.

Trade must lift all boats, raising standards rather than unleashing this race to the bottom. To put a human face on the global economy, trade must be conducted on the basis of respect for internationally recognized human, worker and women's rights and environmental protections.

Only when countries like China take concrete steps to implement and guarantee respect for human and worker rights should they be allowed to enter the World Trade Organization.

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- Ask your organization to endorse the growing movement to bring human and worker rights to the attention of the WTO in Seattle this December.
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"When First We Practice to Deceive"

Richard Rothstein

PRESIDENT CLINTON wants to use federal budget surpluses to "save Social Security first." It's politically inspired gobbledygook. Informed Americans now understand that Social Security is "pay as you go," but most take this to mean that current payroll taxes provide benefits for current retirees, while tomorrow's payroll taxes will support tomorrow's retirees. In fact, however, current "Social Security" taxes go not only for current benefits, but for fighter planes, education, and everything else the government buys.

Social Security is not a retirement program of the "pay as you go" or any other variety, but an income redistribution program. No individual can contribute to his or her own Social Security. There are no individual Social Security accounts. Each year, a portion of working Americans' incomes is transferred to senior citizens. While an individual's Social Security benefit is related to his or her earnings history, the relation is not directly proportional. In contrast to retirement programs in which we typically provide for our own futures according to our own means, active adults transfer disproportionately higher Social Security payments to seniors who, when working, earned lower incomes.

Largely because of Social Security, senior-citizen poverty has declined from 50 percent in 1935 to 11 percent today. (Without Social Security, today's rate would be 47 percent). We do this because, as a society, we believe that active adults should take responsibility for supporting our elders. We could also properly think of Social Security simply as a current spending program in which we collectively purchase goods and services that seniors need for their support, much as we collectively construct highways or operate an army.

Social Security is no different conceptually from public education, where a portion of working Americans' incomes is transferred to youths who are not yet working. (A small difference is that, for youth, we transfer income in the form of services—instruction—whereas, for seniors, we transfer income directly and allow them to purchase goods and services they need with these redistributed funds.) No active adult's taxes go toward his own support when he becomes elderly, any more than an active adult's taxes go toward his own education when he was young. We depend on contemporary adults to educate us when we are young, and we depend on contemporary adults to feed and house us when we are old.

For political reasons, an elaborate architecture of smoke and mirrors has been constructed to obfuscate these simple realities. As a result, Social Security enjoys the political support not only of seniors but of active workers, who foolishly believe their taxes go for their own retirement, not for today's elderly. This raises interesting questions about public morality—that liberals knowingly perpetuate mythology because it helps preserve a liberal program. For the president, this is more significant dishonesty than denying he had sex with an intern but, when it comes to Social Security, we're all complicit in the lying. Indeed, I propose we continue it: we should all support the silly idea that surpluses should be used to "save Social Security first."

IN THE architecture of deceit, we label payroll taxes "Social Security," although these funds and other taxes (like income taxes) all go to the Treasury, which mixes its daily take together in one big pot—it's not possible to say which dollars go to support the elderly and which go for defense. Calling the payroll levy a "Social Security" tax causes great mis-

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chief. To maintain the mythology, the government maintains a set of phony accounting books, in which IOUs are written from one account to another. We even call these IOUs "bonds," although they are strictly an accounting device, not interchangeable with the Treasury bonds you or I could purchase. When, for example, "Social Security taxes" are spent to buy missiles, the Treasury writes itself an IOU for Social Security. Think of this crutch as similar to a housekeeping gimmick—we may tell ourselves that we're borrowing from the "grocery money" to buy birthday presents. If this helps make us responsible about keeping within our budgets, no harm is done by telling ourselves this story, even if we never put the money back. (Some people say that internal government IOUs must be taken more seriously than dipping into the cookie jar, because private investors who hold Treasury bonds will lose confidence if government defaults on IOUs to itself. There may be some merit to this claim, but not much: I'm not less likely to honor my mortgage payment if I fail to replace gift money in the grocery kitty.)

Since 1935, payroll taxes have exceeded what's needed to support the elderly, so the Treasury has been writing many IOUs to itself. ("Social Security taxes" helped win the Second World War, among other accomplishments.) If current tax rates are maintained, the situation will be reversed in approximately 2015, because the number of elderly will be greater and they will be living longer; after this point, taxes collected in the name of "Social Security" will be less than we spend to support the elderly, and other taxes will also then go for their support. To maintain the mythology, we will cancel some IOUs each time this occurs.

THESE PROCEDURES would be no problem unless overall tax rates were too low, relative to all programs for which we want to spend public funds. They are not too low now (in fact, taxes are too high, relative to current spending, which is why we have a budget surplus). Taxes will not likely be too low in the forseeable future, unless our needs increase more than anticipated. If, for example, we engage in a major war, federal expenditures will increase and current tax rates may be insufficient to pay for everything we want to do—including support of the elderly. In this case, we will either have to raise taxes (for revenue purposes, it doesn't matter which tax we raise) or borrow funds until the special needs are taken care of. So the real issue, really the only issue, is whether we now, or will in the future, collect enough taxes to carry out all the activities we want to undertake—defense, highways, welfare, education, and support of the elderly. And if not, should we plan to raise taxes (if we expect the shortfall to be permanent) or borrow funds to undertake them?

Because the number of retirees will grow rapidly after the baby-boom generation begins to retire in 2011, some people have become convinced that Social Security is in "crisis." But the crisis is not self-evident. We always increase spending when we want to increase consumption of any good or service. Most of us want to consume more Internet services now than we did ten years ago. It's no crisis that we've increased spending for this service by about $19.95 per month. Can we afford it? For most, the answer is yes: family incomes have increased by more than $19.95 per month, so we can support this increased consumption without sacrifice. Where incomes have not increased, we can choose to spend $19.95 less on something else—perhaps go to fewer movies so we can stay home and play on the Internet.

That we must spend more to support the elderly in 2015 than we do today is not in itself a crisis—we're increasing our consumption of elderly support, taking care of more old people and for longer lives. Can we afford it? If our incomes are higher in 2015, we probably can afford it without spending less on anything else—that is, without raising tax rates. To make things easier, we also plan to decrease consumption of education for youth at about the same time. While the ratio of seniors to active workers will be higher than today, the ratio of schoolchildren to active workers will be lower. Need for taxes to support the elderly will increase while need for taxes to support children will decline. The elderly are our "Internet," the children the "movies" we no

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longer attend. If, on the other hand, our income increases, we can support more elderly persons for longer lifespans, *and* we can increase the level of support we provide to them, *and* at the same time increase the quantity and quality of education we provide for our (fewer) children. How much we can do all these things depends on how much our income increases between now and then.

These trends are not entirely new. The ratio of elderly to active workers has grown steadily since Social Security began. In 1935, there were sixteen active workers for every elderly beneficiary. Today, there are only 3.3. By the time the youngest of the baby-boom generation retires in 2030, there will be only two. The next thirty years' decrease is tiny compared to that we've already handled, and we've increased benefits at the same time. We've done so because income has grown. We've increased tax rates without sacrificing our standard of living in other areas, and these higher rates have a compound effect because they're applied to higher per capita real incomes. We can afford to support more elderly now than we could sixty years ago, and if our income continues to grow, we will be able to support more later.

In fact, we'll be in better shape than in the past, because we'll no longer have young and old dependents, children and retirees, growing simultaneously as a ratio of active workers. Fewer children won't entirely offset more elderly (and we spend more per senior than per pupil), but fewer children will help. There are now two active workers for every dependent child; there will be 2.3 in 2030. As recently as 1965, when we had a baby boom in children *and* growing numbers of elderly, there were only 1.3 workers per child. We handled this "crisis" with strong economic growth, and we could easily do so again.

Should we use budget surpluses to "save Social Security first"? This idea is more smoke and mirrors. There are only four ways to "save" Social Security when costs rise from higher retiree-to-worker ratios:

Plan A—We can reduce other public expenditures to increase how much we spend on Social Security without raising taxes. As noted, we already expect to decrease how many pupils we support in schools, although we may want to increase the *level* of support, for example by reducing class sizes. (A simple tradeoff is complicated because Social Security is supported by national taxes, whereas education is supported by state and local taxes. If we adopt Plan A, we would increase federal taxes and reduce state and local ones when demographic trends demanded it. This trade would not be a tax increase, but how many myths can we tackle at once?)

Plan B—We can make investments that can potentially increase incomes, and thus purchase more elderly support without raising tax rates.

Plan C—We can increase public borrowing. This might make sense if we thought a higher retiree-to-worker ratio was temporary, the result of a demographic cohort bulge that would quickly pass. (Borrowing might also make sense if, when 2015 rolled around, we were in the trough of a business cycle and wanted, temporarily, to spend more than tax receipts as a way of boosting employment—but this has nothing to do with Social Security.)

Plan D—We can decrease our private consumption in order to spend more public money on the elderly (in other words, we can raise taxes). Even with overly conservative estimates of future economic growth, a payroll tax rate increase of 2 percentage points would cover all projected growth in the number and lifespan of the elderly. Alternatives would be to increase the progressivity of payroll taxes by applying them to higher incomes, or to nonwage income. Or other taxes could be raised. Remember, it all goes into the same pot.

ONE THING we cannot do is "save" the surplus. A dollar earned today is only a claim on today's productive resources. Even if not spent on consumption, it must be "spent" on investment. When individuals "save," they're only executing a trade with other individuals: "I will give up a claim on today's production, and let you have it, provided you promise to give up a claim on tomorrow's production, and let me have it." But our society as a whole cannot "save" (we can trade present for future claims on production with other nations, but this complication

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is not germane here.) As the late, and great, economist Robert Eisner never tired of reminding us,

> We can take bread out of one mouth today and give it to another today. We cannot save bread to give it to ourselves or our children or grandchildren, 50 years from now. The best we can do to make such a transfer is to build an oven that we hope will still be functioning 50 years from now, or train a new baker now who will still be plying his trade then.

(That the economy as a whole cannot have net savings should not be confused with the oft-discussed "savings rate." Our national "savings rate" does not represent net savings—it only represents the extent to which some individuals are giving up claims on today's production to others. Those who believe that the "savings rate" is a good thing expect that consumers who give up claims on production would otherwise have spent income on less useful forms of production than those to whom they give up these claims—investors who spend others' savings on productive tools. But the economy may not benefit if I save part of my paycheck, and my bank then lets another consumer use these savings to run up a credit card bill—which is why the "savings rate" is, shall we say, overrated.)

THUS, THERE is no way to "save" budget surpluses for tomorrow's Social Security, as savings are understood by most people. Dollars earned today must be spent today. If we hold dollar bills and tomorrow try to spend both today's earnings and tomorrow's, we'll only generate inflation, not greater wealth. There are, however, two ways that surpluses can be spent today to help tomorrow's elderly.

- We can pay down federal debt (in effect, spending the surplus by giving it back to government bondholders who will then spend these funds in the private market). This could help Social Security because paying down debt will reduce interest payments the government otherwise plans to make in the next century. Indeed, anticipated surpluses over the next ten years are about equal to the total debt the government owes bondholders (not including government shenanigans in owing money to itself). With this large a surplus utilized to retire debt, the dent in interest payments could total $100 billion a year, which would become available for other purposes. In this sense, paying down debt is a Plan A solution, reducing other government expenditures (that is, interest payments) to make more funds available to support the elderly. Paying down debt could also help tomorrow's elderly if government bondholders take their debt payments and invest them productively—building factories, designing software, etc. If they do this, our income will increase and there will be more revenues in 2015 with which to support retirees, without requiring tax rate hikes. In this sense, paying down debt is a Plan B solution.

- A second way to use surpluses to help tomorrow's elderly is also a Plan B idea—spend it on government programs that will make the country more productive, and thus assure higher incomes in 2015. Conventional projections of a Social Security "crisis" assume that future economic growth will be only 1.6 percent a year. This is only two-thirds of the current rate, which we've achieved with relatively little help in the way of conscious public policy (except for keeping interest rates low). We could do more. Increasing the quantity and quality of education is one way. Improving infrastructure (roads, bridges, airports, train tracks) is another. Supporting medical research, or basic research in all fields, is another. Indeed, increasing public investment by $80 billion a year would only get us back to public investment rates of the 1970s. These public expenditures will increase growth, and thus our incomes in the next century, permitting us to support more elderly for longer, without a tax rate increase.

Clinton's proposal to use surpluses to "save Social Security first" is nothing more than these two ideas. He hopes that spending surpluses to pay down debt and increase public spending will stimulate growth and assure higher incomes in 2015 and beyond, while permitting funds now committed to interest payments to be used instead for other purposes. But these plans have nothing specifically to do with Social Security. They attempt

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to enhance our ability to make *all kinds* of expenditures in 2015—not only support of the elderly, but fighter planes, and schools, and operation of parks.

REPUBLICANS have a third proposal. They want to reduce surpluses by cutting taxes. Some claim this will do a better job of making the country more productive, because taxpayers will stimulate economic growth with higher expenditures from take-home pay. There is more merit to this claim than many liberals acknowledge. It may be a better use of the surplus to "return" it (that is, not take it in taxes in the first place) to middle-income taxpayers than to return it to government bondholders. It's not clear that bondholders make more productive investments than those required by more consumer spending. We can afford to be agnostic about this question.

Why, then, is President Clinton's proposal to "save Social Security" with surpluses (that is, paying off government bondholders so they'll invest and assuring lower government interest payments in the future) preferable to Republican proposals to use surpluses to stimulate private consumption with tax cuts? The reason is political, and it again concerns games we play with ourselves: once tax rates fall, it may be difficult to raise them later, when support of more elderly will require greater spending. At current tax rates, and with anticipated higher incomes (from economic growth), there is no Social Security crisis—there will be adequate funds to support the elderly in future decades. But while lower tax rates may be reasonable for now, they will not be so in the long run. We do not need higher taxes in 2015, but probably could not get by with lower ones. Because we can't trust ourselves to raise taxes when we need to do so later, we can't permit ourselves to lower them now when we can probably afford it.

Republicans want a big tax cut because they *want* to reduce the size and influence of government. As of this writing (July, 1999), the Republican House and Senate have adopted a plan to spend about one-third of next year's $14 billion budget surplus on tax cuts, an amount that will compound to $800 billion over the next ten years, out of a total anticipated surplus of nearly $3 trillion. To make matters worse, the anticipated surplus is an unreliable estimate, based on expectations of no major recessions, no wars, no bear markets, no unforeseen disasters, and, above all, no spending in excess of budget "caps" adopted in 1997. Tax cuts, on the other hand, once written into law, are more difficult to reverse. These Republicans look forward to the day when our public needs (like greater numbers of elderly) increase, and, with lower taxes, we are forced to cut back on other public programs to pay for them. Perhaps we will then be forced to cut Social Security as well. In this sense only, arguments over what to do with our surpluses are arguments over the future of Social Security, and that of every other public enterprise.

Clinton's proposal to use surpluses to "save Social Security first" falls far short of what is desirable, because it is an unbalanced mix of Plan A (reduce future interest payments by paying down the debt) and Plan B (increase future incomes by targeted public investment, including more aid to education and basic research). Clinton's scheme tilts too heavily toward Plan A. Our public investment rate has now fallen so low that it threatens our ability to maintain current growth rates and our ability to increase incomes to the level needed in 2015.

Clinton's judgment, however, is that if Plan B elements of his proposals get any larger, the public will see through them for what they are—expenditures that have no specific relation to Social Security but rather expand responsibility of the public sector for overall prosperity and well-being. In this event, voters, the president apparently fears, are likely to support Republican demands for big tax cuts that may be difficult to reverse later. Clinton has a pretty good track record when it comes to deflecting the most irresponsible of Republican congressional proposals, so his political judgment when it comes to budget surpluses is due some deference.

Instead of proposing to spend more on public investments, Clinton has emphasized Plan A elements of his proposal, presenting them as a Social Security bailout plan with

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procedures so contorted that even his own administration couldn't explain them. In his initial proposal earlier this year, the simple idea of paying down the debt was converted into a scheme to first give a gift of about $3 trillion (the amount of the long-term budget surplus) from the Treasury to the Social Security fund; second, have the Social Security fund turn around to "lend" back about 80 percent of this to the Treasury (investing the rest in the stock market); third, have the Treasury take this "loan" and use it to retire the national debt (pay off private bondholders); and fourth, have the Treasury use general revenues (future tax receipts) to "pay back" the loan to the Social Security fund when the money was later needed for benefits. Whew! If you think this is nothing more than a plan to use current taxes of all kinds to pay down debt, and future taxes of all kinds to pay Social Security benefits, you are right.

Should those who care about Social Security and the public sector's long-term vitality play along with these silly games? Should we call Clinton's plan what it is—a debt reduction and public spending program—and acknowledge that it's not a "save Social Security" plan at all, except to the extent that it saves government's role generally? Should we attack the proposal for its distorted emphasis on Plan A elements at the expense of Plan B?

These are moral and political questions, not economic ones. Speaking truthfully about this plan may make Republican tax cuts more likely. But at some point, the ridiculous accounting mechanisms we've constructed to dress up Social Security as a retirement, not an expenditure plan, will catch up with us and preclude sensible government spending priorities, even when no tax-cut threat looms. In 1935, those designing the Social Security system provided for general tax revenues to pay benefits. President Roosevelt was afraid he couldn't get such a plan passed, so he demanded that staff rewrite it so benefits would be paid only out of "Social Security taxes." "Oh, what a tangled web we weave . . ." ●

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Rethinking Social Security Reform

Ellen Frank

If ever there were an opportunity for progressives to seize control of the policy agenda, if ever Beltway rhetoric seemed ready-made for co-optation by the liberal left, the Social Security crisis is it. Social Security is an immensely popular program, the aged an exceptionally popular cause, and the government is awash in Social Security revenues. Using these surpluses to fund public investments that would benefit wage-earners, their parents, and their children would seem a surefire agenda that could inspire wide public support. Yet progressives, thus far, have let the opportunity pass them by.

For the past two years, many progressive organizations—alarmed by the privatization lobby—have been strongly defending the public pension system. But in focusing on defense, they have overlooked a serious and immediate danger to liberal-left politics in the U.S.: the over-funding of Social Security. In the name of "long-term balance," the Social Security system is collecting billions in excess revenues, derived from a tax that hits low- and middle-income wage-earners especially hard.

Liberals and progressives secretly hope these excess funds will be spent on public investment or on cuts in regressive taxes. Most want the surpluses used, as Clinton put it in his mid-session review, "to meet the great challenges facing our country—caring for our parents, caring for our children." But Clinton proposed no actual programs to address these challenges. And those to Clinton's left have offered no suggestions as to what might be done with Social Security's embarrassment of riches. Unless concrete proposals are placed on the table, the surpluses will fuel proposals from the right that, if enacted, would sharply exacerbate the regressiveness of the federal budget.

If progressives are choosing to ignore Social Security's over-funding in the hope that the money will be spent on progressive causes, isn't it time to say so? If they are hoping for a more liberal Congress in 2000 to use the surpluses wisely, shouldn't they begin making the case now, before the elections take place?

Why Reform is Urgent

The left's failure to take the initiative on Social Security stems in large part, of course, from the lack of strong organizations to push progressive causes. But like the public at large, many left-of-center writers and analysts seem immobilized by the myths and fears the right has promoted. In jumping to the system's defense, they have been ensnared by their own defensiveness. This is both mistaken and dangerous, because the arguments contrived to defend Social Security threaten the very idea of progressive government finance.

(1) The real funding crisis. Left analysts have so frequently repeated the mantra "there is no Social Security funding crisis," that the hundreds of billions pouring into the trust funds have gone unnoticed. Social Security is not under-funded; it is vastly over-funded and will remain over-funded for years to come.

Under the trustee's worst-case assumptions, the system will collect superfluous taxes for at least another 15 years. Under the best-case assumptions, it will accumulate assets as far as the trustee's can project. For at least another decade and perhaps for much of the next century, trillions in excess payroll tax revenues will fill Social Security coffers. As a practical matter, this over-funding means not only that wages are being needlessly over-taxed but that the regressive payroll tax is financing a growing share of non-Social Security federal spending.

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(2) Saving for the baby-boomers. Despite the rhetoric of Social Security boosters, these surplus funds are not being "saved" for baby-boomers or, as some would have it, "invested in the U.S. Treasury securities, the safest investment in the world." Funds collected for Social Security this year are spent this year—whether on war, tax cuts, or debt reduction. The U.S. Treasury spends or otherwise disposes of Social Security's excess moneys as they come in. Funds needed to pay benefits in future years will have to be raised in future years or benefits will have to be cut.

U.S. Treasury securities are nothing more than a claim on future taxpayers, and there is no logical reason for taxpayers to tax themselves today in order to purchase a future claim on themselves. U.S. government bonds may be a legitimate investment for a bank, but they are not a legitimate investment for the U.S. government. That future benefits will have to be paid out of future taxes, regardless of "saving" today, is a simple economic fact. Bonds issued to Social Security are merely promises that need not be kept. Indeed, if current efforts to undermine the system are any guide to the future, they will not be kept.

Nor do these bonds represent, as some argue, a binding obligation of present to future generations. Social Security's bonds are non-negotiable. The system's administrators can redeem them for cash only if Congress allocates cash for this purpose. If Congress and the administration do not wish to budget funds for Social Security, they will simply cut benefits and avoid the need to redeem the bonds. Indeed, plans to do this are already being laid.

(3) Long-term financial balance. By law, Social Security's trustee's must report each year on the "long-term balance" of the system's finances. Congress requires Social Security to keep its books as if it were a private pre-funded pension program and not the public pay-as-you-go-system that economists know it to be. Defenders of the status quo often hold that over-funding preserves the appearance of long-term balance and this illusion, in turn, keeps the system's foes at bay.

But Social Security's supporters are deluding themselves if they believe the fiction of long-term financial balance will placate the privatizers. The last attack on Social Security's "long-term balance" was organized in the 1980s by the conservative Peter Peterson and the Concord Coalition. "Reforms" implemented then—a substantial hike in payroll taxes and numerous cuts in benefits—had the eventual effect of shifting more of the U.S. tax burden to low- and middle-income wage-earners. Liberals at the time capitulated in the belief that they were buying long-term protection for Social Security.

Fifteen years later, though, the privatizers and fear-mongers were back in force, their assaults on the system bolder, shrewder, and more ambitious than ever, even with the system in better long-term financial balance than it had ever been. Currently, 98 percent of the projected federal budget surplus for the next three years can be attributed to excess Social Security taxes. To anti-government conservatives, these surpluses are a provocation—all but begging to be given away as upper-income tax cuts or corporate welfare.

Mark Weisbrot of the Preamble Institute wrote recently that "the effort to 'reform' Social Security has always been...an attack on the program, every bit as much as welfare reform was an attack on welfare." The point is an important one. But the growing trust fund surpluses give new life to these attacks. Thanks to the surpluses, Social Security's perennial opponents—small businesses opposed to the payroll tax and free-market libertarians opposed to social insurance—found a new and deep-pocketed ally in the financial service industry. Calls to replace Social Security with private accounts would hardly have unleashed such a frenzy of lobbying by financial firms were it not for projections of vast pools of federally-controlled savings. It is not serendipity that the privatization push by such financial giants as State Street Corporation coincided with the rapid growth of the trust fund surpluses.

(4) Funding the public sector. Progressives are also leery of calling attention to Social Security's extravagant funding level, for fear that taxes will be cut and the government deprived of revenue to pay for programs the left

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supports. But pretending the surpluses don't exist is a dangerous game.

The Social Security surplus is fueling an intense drive to cut income taxes, estate taxes, and taxes on capital gains. Any such cuts, with the payroll tax left intact in the name of "long-term balance," would dramatically shift the cost of federal government from the rich to the middle classes. If the surpluses continue to mount and no proposals to use them are offered from the left, one of two things will happen. Either Congress will vote to cut progressive levies or the surpluses will be turned over to the finance industry, purportedly to relieve the public of an onerous debt. No other ideas are now on the agenda.

(5) Fear of privatization. Above all, of course, fear of privatization keeps progressives from taking the initiative on Social Security. Better submit, many believe, to regressive taxes and debt repayment than lose altogether the sole universal entitlement program in the U.S., a program that keeps millions of elderly and disabled from poverty. But this fear is exaggerated. Even extreme libertarians like Milton Friedman are not currently advocating any cuts in benefits scheduled for current or soon-to-be retirees. All privatization proposals now on the table foresee gradual reductions in guaranteed benefits, beginning several years from now and affecting only those who are years away from retirement.

What this means is that where the public is able to exert real political control—on the current structure of current programs—Social Security's supporters have won. Furthermore, the cautious and gradual nature of privatization proposals strongly suggests that would-be privatizers do not expect to control the debate for many, many years. Even if Congress—this year or the next—were to funnel Social Security surpluses into individual stock market funds and legislate future cuts in future benefits, there would be no immediate impact on today's beneficiaries; and benefit cuts scheduled for future years could be restored in future years.

The worst that privatizers can accomplish right now is to diminish public expectations of the federal government in the future. In this, I think, they are already succeeding. The more ground the left cedes on this front, the stronger the right will grow. If progressives remain silent on the possibilities for collective provision and public investment, the right may lose an issue or two, but they will have won the war.

An Agenda for Reform

Demographers estimate that, sometime early in the 21st century, one-fifth of the U.S. population will be retired. The United States is poorly set-up to care for such a dependent population. Not only do we lack public services and facilities that vulnerable individuals require, we lack even the minimal legal supports that, in other countries, enable workers to care for the vulnerable. Public anxiety about the country's ability to cope with the retiring baby-boomers is both wide-spread and well-founded. Adding paper promises to the Social Security trust fund in no way eases the coming retirement burden—unless savings made today are invested in real resources that can be drawn upon by future workers and retirees.

A progressive agenda for Social Security reform should emphasize four points:

- Since Social Security taxes are paid only by working people, surplus Social Security funds should be expended on behalf of working people or should be returned to them.
- Social Security's surpluses present the nation with a unique opportunity to invest in resources that will benefit workers and their dependents.
- Placing Social Security savings in the stock market or using them to repay federal debts are no substitutes for real investment; all such schemes should be rejected.
- The U.S. must invest in real assets that will prepare us for the baby-boom retirement.

What sorts of real investments might improve current living standards and lighten the financial burden of retiring baby-boomers?

(1) Investments to reduce future cash needs. Constructing affordable housing for retirees and their families, developing community centers for old and young alike, building networks of community health clinics, expanding public transport systems: investments of this sort would relieve the aged of the need to purchase private transport, housing, and other services.

Such investments would have multiple

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payoffs. Consider just one possible example—community health clinics. If developed over the next five to ten years, a network of clinics could relieve strains on the Medicare system and free up funds to address, finally, the financially ruinous drug and catastrophic care issues. A well-funded system of clinics, by providing walk-in care not only to the aged, but also to the poor and uninsured, would reduce financial burdens on the Medicaid system. A system of community-based clinics, by providing alternatives to private hospitals and HMOs, could loosen the grip of corporations on U.S. health policy. By stressing preventive care, community clinics might improve public health and reduce outlays on disabilities.

But most important from the perspective of Social Security, a system of community clinics could transform the spending patterns of the elderly. Currently Medicare co-insurance, co-payments, pharmaceuticals, and other out-of-pocket costs represent an enormous drain on the budgets of elderly households. If these patterns of medical spending persist unabated over the next ten years, the financial needs of retirees—on top of Medicare spending itself—will become insupportable. Cash benefits to all but the most affluent retirees will have to be substantially increased if the elderly are to obtain minimal health care and enjoy a decent standard of living.

This is not intended as an argument for health clinics, per se. Comparable justifications could be made in support of housing programs or any number of other worthwhile investments. The central point is that public investments, insofar as they provide alternatives to cash outlays on private goods and services, can actually reduce the need for large cash transfers to the elderly in the future.

(2) Investments to support future workers. Lest readers object that the U.S. already devotes too much to the old and too little to the young, Social Security's hundred-plus billion dollar surpluses could be invested in the health and education of future workers—today's children—whose skills and productivity will, after all, be required to support the elderly. Or the U.S. could develop subsidized child and elder care facilities, facilities that future workers will inevitably need to care for a growing dependent population.

(3) Investment in real resources. Many argue that because the economy is producing at maximum capacity, there are too few unemployed workers available to embark on large-scale public investments. If that is the case, use Social Security surpluses to purchase open land for conservation and recreation. Social Security funds could subsidize development of clean automobile engines. Or, rather than give the surpluses to Wall Street (to repay debt), why not use funds to compensate the oil industry for losses as sustainable energy sources come on line?

Lobbying by the fossil-fuel industry, with billions invested in oil fields and refineries, is a primary obstacle to dealing with climate change. While transferring tax receipts to the likes of Mobil Corporation is regressive, it could yield far greater long-term benefits than buying back federal bonds. Using Social Security funds to deal today with environmental destruction and global warming—which takes a harsh toll on the very old—will substantially improve the quality of life for the aged.

(4) Cutting taxes. If realpolitik favors tax cuts over spending, then progressives should advocate cuts in the payroll tax. Most low-income workers now pay more in payroll tax than in federal income taxes. If Social Security were restored to a pay-as-you-go basis—and there is no rational reason why it should not be—the tax rate on payroll could be cut by 25 percent, or eliminated altogether on the first $15,000 in wages with no impact at all on the ability of Social Security to pay benefits. If the $72,600 cap on taxed earnings were lifted, the payroll tax rate could be reduced by nearly 40 percent.

Perhaps other analysts can offer better and more imaginative uses of the Social Security surpluses. The left does not lack for bright ideas, and this list is not meant to be exhaustive. But neither these nor other ideas will get a hearing until progressive organizations begin to raise them. ●

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Democrats and Catholics

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

IF I TOLD you I was born into the O'Brien family in Chicago in 1941, that my father was an ardent union member, that both my parents were staunch Catholics, that we lived in a two-flat owned by my uncle on the same street on which my father grew up, I'd wager you'd have no trouble guessing how my family voted, or even how I've voted most of my life. It may be sacrilegious to say so, but when you were baptized a Catholic in Chicago you were also baptized a member of the Democratic Party. True, you couldn't vote until you were twenty-one (when you would vote for the incumbent), but there were lots of other tasks for the niece of a Democratic precinct captain. And I happily carried them out, including telling my age-mates that Thomas Dewey, if elected president, would make us go to school on Saturday.

There were Republicans, and some of them were Catholic too; in fact, the Republican precinct captain belonged to the same parish as we did. There was no accounting for some people—that's what the O'Briens thought about Bob O'Rourke. Could it have been that he had a bit more money than the rest, or that being a lawyer meant he had different interests? There was no talk of class warfare here, but clearly his interests weren't ours. Enough said.

Machine politics worked in Chicago. Civic engagement—the holy grail of the nineties—was the bread and butter of people like my aunt, whose city job and political activism were a seamless cloth that included neighborliness; ethnic, if not racial, tolerance; taking people to the polls and to the doctor; getting the potholes filled and the garbage collected.

I wax nostalgic and, yes, maybe I am wearing rose-colored glasses. But let's face it, our politics doesn't work that way any more.

Today's party system is a long way from that thick culture of family, church, neighborhood, and lifelong affiliation. It's some distance, too, from the extensive overlap that once connected the way you voted and the way your elected representatives voted; so too from expectations that he (and not she back then) would be with you not only legislatively, but also when it came to the parking tickets and real life problems. Phone calls were answered. Kids went to city summer camps. Men got jobs. No longer. The state of political homelessness that many Americans feel—certainly as represented by low voter turnout, declarations of party independence, and the erosion of bloc voting—is a result of a disconnect between vote and representation, between party platforms and personal values. The personal may have become political, but politics, it seems, is no longer personal.

At various times and for a variety of reasons, from Nixon through Reagan, a good number of Catholics slipped into the Republican Party. A great deal was made of Reagan Democrats—traditional New Deal Democrats who shifted to the Republican Party in 1980 when Ronald Reagan was first elected president but who retained much of their Democratic Party profile. (In *The Inheritance: How Three Families and America Moved from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond,* Samuel Friedman brilliantly captures the trajectory of some East Coast third-generation Catholics into the Republican fold.) And yet Catholics have not finally become Republicans (See David Leege, "The Catholic Vote in '96," *Commonweal*, September 27, 1996). There are holdouts, millions of them, and there have been returnees to the Democratic Party.

I have been one of the holdouts. Still a Catholic, still a Democrat. I go to the polls

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every election—reluctantly. Though I can't bring myself to touch the Republican lever, I find it increasingly difficult to pull the Democratic one. I voted for Bill Clinton in 1992, but couldn't touch the presidential lever in 1996. I have become a highly selective Democrat. One of these elections, I will have *not* voted for more Democrats, than I have voted for in more than three decades of showing up at the voting booth. I am still a registered Democrat—why be anything else in New York City? But I suffer from political homelessness. Neither political party represents my views or the views of many of my fellow Catholics. My "baptismal" party seems tone-deaf to many of the issues it historically championed, and it has become a champion of some issues at odds with its communitarian and social democratic *lite* past—politics that gave many Catholics a political home.

"Become a Republican then," you say.

Leave aside my ancestral antibodies to the Republicans. More than ever this is the party of the haves, of corporations, of lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, well-off suburbanites; people who don't want to pay taxes; who don't want to pay for or regulate on behalf of the common good; who want to own and carry guns; and who bear the taint of their racist politics.

The Democratic Party is the opposite of all of this, or pretends to be. It acknowledges the existence of the have-nots; it is the party of African Americans, most immigrants, and most minorities. It recognizes that we have to pay for schools, for welfare, for occupational safety, for environmental protection. It knows that most older Americans depend on Social Security and Medicare and that most poor children need some form of welfare assistance and Medicaid. At least that's the theory—and the posture.

In practice, the Republicanization of the Democratic agenda under Bill Clinton raises questions about the party's real allegiances. True, welfare needed an overhaul and work is better than welfare—as long as there is work. Some budget surpluses could go for tax cuts as long as we pay attention to areas of the public sector long starved by the budget cuts of the eighties. In fact, as we scan his administration, can't we conclude that Clinton has legitimated and reinforced the Republican shredding of the New Deal/New Frontier social net?

And there is another problem with the Democrats. I said I voted for Bill Clinton in 1992, but not in 1996. In 1992, he promised that in his administration he would work to make abortions "safe, legal, and rare." Whether or not this was wholly credible (certainly many of my prolife friends thought anyone a fool for believing him), I took it as a signal that abortion was about to become an issue for many Democrats, not only Catholics, and a recognition that the on-demand regime in place needed tempering and greater moral scrutiny. (After all, Clinton's own Baptist denomination could hardly be called prochoice.) It was not simply the 1.5 million abortions that took place every year, it was that second and even third trimester abortions had become an acceptable medical practice. Wasn't it time for a more careful look at what Americans were really "choosing" when they announced themselves prochoice? Could we begin to make some distinctions between good and bad choices? That's what I hoped Clinton was raising by "safe, legal, and rare."

His phrase seemed to speak to two opposed constituencies. The women's movement and the abortion movement wanted safe and legal abortions available. Why should they care if abortions were rarer, as long as they were safe and legal? I assume, after all, that prochoice advocates see the abortion choice as a tragic one for most women. It is not quantity that concerns them, is it? It is quality and accessibility that they want. So I argued with myself.

The second constituency was more varied, less cohesive, and, except for the prolife movement itself, completely unorganized. Some women and men with religious or moral objections to abortion wanted them rare because they consider abortion the taking of human life, but which can sometimes be justified. Others, who may be agnostic on when human life begins, nonetheless recognize that there are better and worse reasons for seeking an abortion or that the cultural and social conse-

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quences of on-demand abortion are not all in the benefits column. They wouldn't mind if abortions were, if not rare, *rarer*. In conversation such people might argue that rather than a triumph of choice, abortion can be an instrument for exploiting the poor and the young, and even women generally. Some might even wonder if there was a yet unexamined connection between the violence of American culture and the anger or fear or guilt that some women, men, and children consciously and subconsciously feel about abortion. Why couldn't abortions remain safe and legal, and also be rarer, if there were a change in attitude that might begin with some acknowledgment, as I hoped Clinton was implying, that there were social and moral costs to a policy of on-demand abortion.

Though I am opposed to abortion, I recognize that they will take place, legal or not. Having watched the struggle, pro and con, since *Roe v. Wade*, I accept that there is almost no chance that that there will be any significant shift in the law, except at the margins (such as requiring parental consent for minors). To my mind, the only viable alternative is education, debate, persuasion, and symbolic acts and language, like Clinton's 1992 campaign promise. I have always hoped, and continued to do so, that, over time, these could make the attentive citizen more critical of the way abortion functions in our society and more attentive to the possibility that the abortion "choice" could be critically examined apart from its constitutional status. And finally, I looked for the day when someone would question its role as a litmus test in the Democratic Party.

After Clinton's election in 1992, it quickly became clear that, as with many of his *pronunciamentos*, the words, "safe, legal, and rare," did not match his actions. He was barely sworn in before he rescinded a Reagan-era executive order that had barred the use of American tax dollars abroad for promoting abortions or changes in abortion restrictions through international aid and family planning programs.

Then late in his first term, the president vetoed a bill that would have reserved the use of intact dilation and extraction, a particularly grisly and difficult method of late-term abortion, to saving the life of the mother. At the veto ceremony, the president surrounded himself with weeping women who said they had had the procedure. It had become clear that any restrictions on abortion or abortion methods, even one that bore a strong resemblance to infanticide, was unacceptable to the women's movement and the abortion rights movement, and apparently to Clinton as well. I thought that in this White House scene, with the president in the starring role, he went out of his way to offend those—and not just prolifers—who thought intact dilation and extraction was morally offensive and, since alternatives were available, medically unnecessary. Now, of course, near the end of his second term, who could be surprised by Clinton's opportunistic theatrics? But it surprised me then.

Clinton's rhetoric and gestures are only the symptom of a deeper problem. After two decades of political struggle, abortion turns out to be a marginal policy issue for both Republicans and Democrats, but it has had a very different impact on the two parties. For one thing, Republicans do not shy away from the prolife side of the issue. When in office, Reagan and Bush were willing to tinker at the edges of abortion policy and vet Supreme Court nominees for their views (though as it turns out this has made no difference on the Court's abortion decisions; to the contrary, Justices David Souter and Sandra Day O'Connor provided it with firmer grounding in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*). Republican candidates persistently go after the small number of single-issue anti-abortion voters and Republican prolife candidates are regularly nominated and elected to the House and Senate. Not so the Democrats.

No prolife candidate will get Party endorsement or campaign funds. Emily's List, which raises money nationally for Democratic women candidates, has a prochoice litmus test. That means a major funding source for women candidates automatically precludes any woman who would raise any critical questions about the nation's abortion policies. Furthermore, as time has passed, the prochoice

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outlook and arguments have spilled over into other arenas.

Consider physician-assisted suicide (PAS)—a matter that might seem, at first glance, distinct from abortion. PAS has been added to the prochoice agenda. In Washington State, where a referendum in favor of physician-assisted suicide lost at the polls in 1991, a coalition of groups appealed to the federal district court. Among those filing *amicus* briefs were the Seattle chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Local 6 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), major Democratic Party players. What any NOW or SEIU members actually thought about physician-assisted suicide we don't know, and perhaps it makes no difference, since the underlying issue turned out to be the right to abortion and a defense of choice.

U.S. District Court judge Barbara Rothstein's ruling explicitly compared the decision of a woman to end a pregnancy to the decision of a terminally ill person to end his or her life. She linked her finding that the Washington ban was unconstitutional to a range of Supreme Court abortion decisions, especially *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (in which the Court shifted the abortion "right" from a privacy right to a liberty interest). Her line of argument was temporarily tabled when the Supreme Court ruled that PAS, at least for the time being, should be left to the states. The Democratic candidate in Michigan's 1998 governor's race was a PAS proponent and Jack Kevorkian's lawyer. Would anyone be surprised to find in state-by-state battles, groups like NOW or NARAL (the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League) or union locals favoring PAS—not because they necessarily favor the practice but because they see it linked to their support of abortion? Is this the future of the Democratic Party?

I used to ask myself whether I would feel so strongly if the issue that turned Democrats into a hybrid of Republicans and libertarians were not abortion but something else. Now I know. I feel just as strongly about Democratic Party support of the death penalty, cuts in social welfare, and physician-assisted suicide. My opposition to each of them shares the common assumption that protection of the most vulnerable, the poorest, the most fragile members of human society, and yes, even the outcast, is one of the primary purposes of politics. Once upon a time, it was one of the Democratic Party's primary purposes. That's why Catholics voted Democratic.

I am loath to say it, and I say it with great reluctance, but I am coming to think of the Democratic Party not as the party of the people, or the party of the poor and vulnerable, but as the party of death. Strong words, I know. But words that I hope will help politically homeless "Democrats," Catholic and otherwise, shape up and convince their party that a libertarian litmus test is not the basis for a viable Democratic Party or sound public policy. And what of our liberal and left allies? Where is this litmus test taking them? Will they support physician-assisted suicide because they believe it helps support the right to an abortion?

Roe v. Wade is here to stay: the right to abortion is constitutionally protected. That will not change. And because it will not change, perhaps it is time for the Democratic Party and the liberal-left to stop making it the lens through which candidates and issues must be scrutinized. Consider by way of analogy that the right to bear arms is also constitutionally protected. That has not prevented a vigorous political debate about better and worse ways to allow that right to be exercised. In that debate, gun control has not become a litmus test for either Democrats or Republicans; elected representatives, for better or worse, are allowed to represent their constituents on the policy questions at hand. All analogies are imperfect and mine may even seem offensive to prochoice supporters. But isn't it time for the Republicans to be deprived of their cynical use of abortion politics? Isn't it time for Democrats to stop being held hostage to prochoice politics? ●

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Social Democracy: Past and Future

Edward Broadbent

AT THE CLOSE of the century, many people believe that liberalism or neoconservatism* has emerged triumphant. The evidence for this view is considerable. During the past two decades, in many of the developed democracies the state has been in retreat before the onslaught of the market. Hundreds of millions liberated within the old Soviet empire have seen Leninism replaced by unregulated capitalism and minimal government. Even the once mighty Asian tigers are under unrelenting pressure from the Americans and the International Monetary Fund to shed their state-led form of capitalism and adopt the "normal" model—that of the United States.

During the same two decades, international trade and development policies have been characterized by policies and treaties that deliberately exclude any consideration of justice or human rights. We have also seen the successful emergence of a new global association of conservative, liberal, and republican parties. The explicit goal of the International Democratic Union, established at a conference hosted by Margaret Thatcher in London in 1983, is the global spread of market economies and limited government. While endorsing political and civil rights, it strongly opposes economic and social rights. It now has a membership of seventy governing and opposition parties in over sixty countries.

As if this picture were not ominous enough for the left, many of our own political parties, notably in the Anglo-American world, seem to have discovered once unsuspected virtues in liberalism. One hundred years ago, the leading German social democratic theorist Eduard Bernstein had quite plausibly predicted that the twentieth century would see the triumph not of liberalism, but of social democracy. What, we may ask, has been going on?

We should begin by acknowledging liberalism's significant contributions to humanity: artistically creative societies, rapid economic growth, scientific discoveries, medical cures in abundance, and for ordinary people a supply of consumer goods and services that only ascetics can decry. Unquestionably, its greatest political gift has been the amalgam of rights-based representative government anchored by tolerant civil societies in which pluralism and the rule of law prevail.

This being acknowledged, we must ask, what about our new or residual problems—consumption as a way of life, increasing class-based inequality, sexism, racism, ecological destruction, unemployment? Contemporary liberals claim that such matters either require stronger doses of some aspect of liberalism, or are irremediable in any form of free society. In any case, they contend, social democray had its chance during the four decades following World War II, and has lost out.

Why should this be? If liberalism in its various phases and contradictions has been with us for more than three hundred years, why should the time of testing for social democracy, its most significant offspring, be reduced to less than half a century?

Rather than more liberalism, what is required is social democracy on a global scale. However, as they say, social democracy itself must first be understood. To decide in politi-

*Throughout this essay I use the terms "liberalism," "neoconservatism," and "neoliberalism" synonymously.

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cal life where we should go, it's useful to have a prior understanding of what we are.

The social democratic movement has unquestionably been the principal democratic alternative to liberalism in this century. During the past fifty years it has provided the guiding ideology to many governments, and these governments have changed the world for the better. Social democrats were responsible for a remarkable new concept of citizenship that began to take root in the North Atlantic states following the war. Unlike Leninism, which led to the fanatical suppression of liberty, social democracy managed to achieve within many states the foundation for what a feasible socialism can be—the most highly textured mix of liberty and equality the world has ever seen.

Social democracy's fundamental concern and basic difference from liberalism centers on equality. Whether articulated in the humanist speeches of Willy Brandt or with the conceptual clarity of Olaf Palme or simply implemented by trade unions or legislatures in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, or Canada, this commitment to equality has played a crucial role in the evolution of democracy in our century, one that produced a transformation in the lives of millions of ordinary people.

At the turn of the century "socialist" and "social democrat" were used synonymously. But shortly after the appearance of Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism* in 1898, social democrats increasingly saw themselves as those socialists who believed in the nonviolent transformation of capitalist society. Contrary to what Marx had forecast fifty years before in the *Manifesto,* improvements had begun to take place *within* the "bourgeois" democracies. After ordinary people won the battles for political and civil rights, they used these new entitlements in the workplace and in civil society to their advantage. They created or supported political parties that would use state power to legislate improvements in work and other social conditions. Liberal democracy may have been bourgeois but it was not a hoax. The relative balance of class power began to change.

Over time, most social democrats came to believe that the goal of social equality was compatible with some form of market economy. This belief took a decisive turn in the years immediately following the Second World War. The rise of strong trade unions and the social impact of the war helped generate the impetus for major social reform on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Thus the modern welfare state was born. The social democratic version of the welfare state was predicated on a set of universal social and economic provisions functioning side by side with markets. Indeed, such provisions required the economic growth made possible by a market economy. To ensure that social benefit would be the result, however, a capitalist economy required an intervening government. This combination—social rights, market economy, and activist government—laid the foundation for what was neither Marxist nor liberal, but rather a superior new notion of democratic citizenship. Thoughtful social democrats rightly contended that they could create new societies with a much higher level of personal freedom and distributive justice than had ever been thought possible. This notion of the need for deeply embedded social rights alongside the operations of a market economy is unique to social democracy.

Liberalism Past and Present

Neoconservatives or liberals do not share this view. For them, the good society is one in which all citizens start out on the basis of formal equality in political and civil rights. The economy is based on capitalist principles. Although this entails inequality in assets at birth, for the liberal, equal access to education should make it possible for all individuals to compete more or less on equal grounds; economic rewards are allocated on the principle of greater amounts going to those with greater innate ability or to those who make a more energetic effort or perform a task the market deems important. Any resulting inequalities, to a liberal, are exactly as they should be. It is equality of opportunity, not substantive equality, that counts. Liberals work for formal equal access to political and civil rights. "Safety-net welfare"—government provision to ensure that the poor don't become destitute—is the liberal norm for social policy. This is the goal for

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the large majority of U.S. Democrats and Republicans, U.K. Conservatives, European Liberals, and Canadian Liberals, Conservatives, and Reformers.

Social democrats join with liberals in a commitment to all political and civil rights. But our commitment to equality entails much more. We see it as self-evident that the exercise of these rights cannot be equally available to all in a society with a significant degree of income inequality. In a market economy where the large majority of goods and services are bought and sold, choice requires cash; the less cash, the less choice; the less choice, the less freedom. The rich do have more freedom. Furthermore, the liberal emphasis on procedural rights alone is morally inadequate on other grounds. We maintain that a substantial degree of social equality based on citizenship is an essential characteristic of a good society. And we strongly assert that such social equality is different in kind from income equality. Indeed, the strong presence of social equality can serve to alter considerably the negative effects of income differentials.

Welfare States

As the century closes we can now see that the great accomplishment of social democrats has been the creation of a new kind of democracy. During the three decades following the war, social entitlements ceased to be marginal in daily life. In both number and diversity, they produced a qualitatively different kind of society.

During this period, throughout Northern and Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, most of the following came to be seen as rights by the average citizen: health care, education up to and including university, self-supporting income during periods of unemployment, and pensions at a level to ensure a life of dignity in old age. And from the mid-1960s through the 1980s, there emerged a plethora of government programs targeted to women, visible minorities, the handicapped, and the poor. Beyond these rights and entitlements there emerged the general expectation, encouraged by governments, that the fruits of cultural, scientific, and economic innovation would be broadly shared by all. In some of these states—in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, and Germany—poverty for citizens was virtually eliminated. In all welfare states, more people had more freedom than ever before in history. In social democratic welfare states, social entitlements were not restricted to the poor as bailout provisions but were provided as universal rights for all.

THE POSTWAR shift toward the collective goal of social rights was the product of a constellation of powerful social forces. In Britain and Western Europe, unions had reached the peak of their power at this time. And the political strength of the newly elected Labour government in Britain as well as the strong presence of the left in Scandinavia and elsewhere on the continent illustrated the depth of the desire for change. Returning veterans and ordinary people everywhere wanted no return to the 1930s. They combined to insist that their governments provide for their social needs as well as their political rights.

Although the ideological leadership for this recasting of citizenship came from the left, other forces were also at play. On the continent, some Christian Democratic parties embraced a "social market" ideology. In Britain and the United States, wartime leaders moved in a new direction. Having lived through the Great Depression, Nazism, and World War II, both Churchill and Roosevelt had come to believe that laissez-faire capitalism was itself a major cause of social and political conflict. Although Churchill was swept from office at the war's end, it was his coalition cabinet with Labour that made the decision in 1942 that social and economic rights were to be added to the liberal legacy of political and civil rights. This family of rights was to be put in place not only in postwar Britain, but as an integral part of the postwar global order. In the United States, at least at the highest level, similar thinking was at work. In his last State of the Union address in 1944, President Roosevelt called for the United States to adopt an Economic Bill of Rights. "True individual freedom," he said, "cannot exist without economic security and independence. 'Necessitous men are not free men.' In the pursuit of happiness,

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political rights are no longer sufficient."

Roosevelt was rebuffed by Congress, which refused to accept economic or any other social rights. The United States did, however, create its own version of a liberal "safety-net" welfare state. In Canada, more serious political change was underway. Within a two-year period at war's end, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation almost won an election in Ontario, led in a national opinion poll for the first time, and in Saskatchewan formed North America's first socialist government. Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King, ever sensitive to what was needed to maintain power, immediately produced a federal policy agenda that resulted over the years in a number of universal social programs.

Within the new welfare states, it was expected that citizenship would now entail much higher levels of both economic security and social justice. Such citizens, in turn, would contribute to building and sustaining tolerant democratic societies. Once reassured of the universal entitlement to the opportunity of work, access to health services, and an adequate pension, it was believed, such citizens would more likely become supporters of political and social rights for others at home and be more generous in their views of those who lived in distant lands.

This is precisely what happened: affirmative action programs for women and people of color obtained the support of (or at least did not generate significant opposition from) white, male industrial workers, who thought they finally had governments that took seriously the task of ensuring an acceptable level of social justice. They also supported foreign aid programs abroad. For millions, it was the Golden Age.

Markets: Harnessed and Subverted

To social democrats, the possibility of ever-increasing social equality necessarily involves a complex set of relationships that serve to both harness and subvert the role of the market. We see the market mechanism as the best means of ensuring the production, distribution, and sale of the large majority of goods and services. At the same time, we see the democratic state as the essential means of ensuring that men and women do not become enslaved to the severe inequality and commercialization of life that unfettered markets produce. Left on their own in civil society, ordinary people can have the formal benefits of political and civil rights, but civil society cannot itself produce social and economic rights. Social democrats contend that certain goods, services, and activities should be deemed to be of such importance to human dignity that they should be removed from dependence on market criteria. They should become citizens' rights. This is a decision made in a political process and it can be achieved only by the state.

Because the state depends upon the innovation and productive efficiency of the market to ensure social goods at a level beyond scarcity, social democrats sanction private ownership, competition, and differences in income. Thus they accept many of the inequalities that come from a class-divided capitalist economy. However, with progressive taxation *and* with the strong presence of egalitarian social rights, the negative effects of market-based inequalities can be considerably reduced. As long as ordinary citizens can send their children to good public schools, have free comprehensive health services, benefit from income and retraining programs when they are unemployed, have an annual paid vacation with access to healthy air and clean beaches, and retire with dignity, most will regard with neither envy nor contempt the lifestyle of the jet set. They will simply be indifferent. It is this balance between market principles and nonmarket values—whose specific content varies over time—that has made possible the sense of freedom and social equality experienced by millions of ordinary people. Free from the time demands and anxiety otherwise needed to make personal decisions about health, retirement, and education, they are literally freer to choose how to spend their time. Listening to Bach, playing baseball, or drinking beer and talking with friends on a sunny afternoon become real options. Freed in major elements of their lives from the compulsive and restrictive elements of the market, they come remarkably close to having the free lives that liberals talk about but that only so-

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cial democracy can make possible.

In terms of social philosophy, in such circumstances it becomes morally quite tenable for the ordinary worker to accept a fundamental assumption of the market economy: unequal talents can result in unequal rewards. Even inequality in assets at the beginning of one's life can be acceptable if in the same society such inequality is compensated for by the provision of a wide range of social and economic rights that otherwise might never be achievable. The well-functioning social democratic state after the war offered an imperfect but feasible moral alternative to both capitalism and communism. It was no wonder that the extremes of left and right that flourished during the Depression withered away during this period in the North Atlantic democracies. Most of the dominant parties had come to accept the legitimacy of an activist and equalizing state.

In postwar states founded on social democratic principles, social and economic rights were established on the same moral basis as political and civil rights. The difference between the two categories of rights is not found in the principle of universality, which applies to both. The difference is that a social right, whether in the form of individual payments (pensions) or a social good (health services), requires the allocation of economic resources by the state at a more significant level than those required to enforce most civil and political rights. The level of benefit is dependent upon a given nation's stage of economic development *and* on the competing claims of the state's other financial obligations *and* on the political will of the government. When health care is established as a social right, its value at delivery is not dependent on a citizen's capacity to purchase but on the amount of resources a democratic state decides to allocate for medical purposes. At whatever level of provision, in other words, a rich lawyer should have no better treatment than a bank clerk. Similarly, in education, all should benefit equally from high-quality publicly funded schools. Currently, in Sweden, France, Germany, and Canada, a majority of the rich send their children to the same public schools and use essentially the same medical services as other citizens, because the quality is maintained at a high level. That this is not the case in Britain reflects successive governments' failure to provide education and health care at a high common level. It is no accident that the sense of class inequality continues to be felt more deeply in Britain than in any other modern democracy. Deeply embedded unequal, two-class, two-tier access to the most important social services, education and health, have made this inevitable. The problem with the welfare state that Tony Blair inherited is that, in crucial respects, it was never social democratic in the first place. Nor will it be, until the British are willing, like their continental neighbors, to pay the taxes necessary to make it possible.

Should a social democratic state modify or eliminate a significant number of universal social programs it would, of course, at some point cease to be social democratic. Canada, whose population first began to describe itself as "sharing and caring" only after years of a mix of strong universal and targeted social programs had been put in place, could soon find that among the population both the practice and the self-description disappear. The current policies of the federal (and many provincial) governments are undermining health and education programs. The federal government cut billions of dollars needed and is now planning pre-election tax cuts with the surplus. The more these foundational institutions are changed, the less Canadians will see themselves as sharing and caring—the more they will feel they have to look out for themselves. And the more they see themselves this way, the more they will support low-tax policies that undermine the institutional foundation of social rights.

Values, leaders, and ideology count. Social rights are established by citizens acting as equals in the political process. They can be taken away by the same process.

Individualism

The social democratic welfare state should be seen for what it is: a principled, functioning, real alternative to liberal, U.S.-style capitalism. The liberal sees human life as unfolding

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in a society in which all citizens fundamentally compete with each other. The social democrat rejects this competitive, individualist model. This rejection is not based on a utopian counter-vision that sees humans as unalienated, creative, and altruistic. Instead, our version of individualism rests on a view of humanity that is much closer to reality than the caricature that continues to be promoted by liberals. Social democratic individualism is one that incorporates cooperation. It's an individualism that derives from seeing human beings as inescapably social creatures, which results in pursuing both personal and common goals. Canadians desire the personal choices that come from the market, but they have also created 175,000 voluntary organizations whose very essence is to do things with and for our neighbors on a not-for-profit basis. For social democrats, doing things with our neighbors for the common good includes using democratic government for the same purpose. For us, cooperation doesn't stop where the state begins.

Unlike liberals, classical or neo-, social democrats see the human capacity to cooperate as a practical and moral foundation for universally based social objectives radically dissociated from market criteria. Unlike Marxists, old or new, the social democrat sees our permanent disposition to seek our own benefit as being productively useful. A social rights-based form of market economy is not, therefore, either a compromise of liberal democratic principles or some halfway step to a Marxist utopia. It is instead the best kind of society that can be constructed, given these two differing aspects of our nature. It provides for a broad range of individual and collective rights, the opportunity for personal and community good.

The Neoliberal Challenge

The social democratic marriage of the welfare state brings together the two human dispositions of cooperation (equal universal social programs) and self-interest (unequal wage and salary incomes based on market performance). Like all marriages, it is precarious. Balance is required. If self-interest is replaced by selfishness or if altruism is expected to prevail over cooperation, the social democratic welfare state runs into trouble.

In a well-functioning social democracy neither selfishness nor altruism dominates. But both are bordered or touched upon. Taxes needed for universal social services obtain widespread support precisely because the services themselves are provided to everyone. I willingly pay today because I or my children will be a beneficiary tomorrow. I am even willing to pay more than "my share" on the condition that others do their share of work and the overall level of social programs continues to meet my needs.

THE MARKET, however, inevitably raises the possibility for selfish or greedy behavior to become more widespread. The market does allow for the normal disposition of most people to work on a regular basis simply in terms of self-interest. This is not to say they are selfish, nor *a fortiori* are they driven by economic greed. These are quite different. However, *some* are driven by selfishness. And the market by definition, alas, provides legal leeway to this minority. When left to their own devices, the Hobbesian competitive forces of the market inevitably pressure us all to move in the direction of selfishness.

The ideology of those controlling the state is thus of great importance. Values matter. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan made a difference in the Anglo-American world. Whereas some earlier pragmatic conservatives had supported the left in establishing the welfare state, these two radicals led an all-out attack on its ideological foundations. They were the first modern heads of government to do so. Having a narrow and distorted view of the human personality, they attacked social rights as an unjustified burden on individual self-realization. Thatcher once even claimed that society does not exist; only individuals do. She thereby justified her slashing of state provisions as "liberating" citizens from all inessential obligations imposed by the state.

Citizenship thus becomes quite narrow in scope. In fact, for many neoliberals "politics" is outside the ideal of the good life. Such a life is to be experienced primarily in the personal realms of family, work, and neighbor-

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hood. In their view, cooperation in civil society is fine. But cooperation through the democratic use of the state for social purposes, as Reagan once said, is misguided. In this thinking one's public obligation becomes so minimal and private life so significant that the former virtually disappears. Just as totalitarianism eradicates the personal in favor of the collective, so neoliberalism eliminates the political pursuit of the public good in its triumphant promotion of the private self. Citizenship as a social enterprise disappears.

These Anglo-American leaders attacked the notion of collective and cooperative social identity on every conceivable occasion. After all, if democratic electorates could be persuaded that private consumption is *the* goal of the good life, then any future return to an activist state could be made less likely.

And the neoliberal attack was not restricted to domestic politics. It also became the underpinning of what George Bush called the new world order. In both the nation-state and in foreign affairs, the objective was to reverse the postwar egalitarian commitments. No longer in global competition with Soviet communism for the hearts and minds of ordinary people, Western governments aided and abetted the spread of turbo-charged capitalism. Ignoring their international human rights obligations, they openly propagated the self-serving and intellectually fatuous view that commerce and rights don't mix. The result was the neoliberal World Trade Organization, which lacks workers' rights or environmental conditionality provisions, both of which are profoundly affected by economic change.

The Future

As the new millennium approaches, Bernstein's optimism of a century ago at first blush seems misplaced. Those North Atlantic democracies with the weakest or nonexistent social rights traditions—Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—have moved backward. They have reduced or frozen social entitlements and, by other policies as well, have increased the commercialization of life's activities.

However, in continental Europe, where social democracy has been strongest both ideologically and in practice, the determination by governments and their electors to maintain the egalitarian essence of social citizenship, while adapting to new circumstances, is more durable.

So, what is to be done? For social democrats there can be no simple-minded return to what worked in the 1960s. We must address the problems of social and economic life that began to emerge during the period of the welfare state's Golden Age (1945-1980): the lower rates of economic growth, greater proportional costs of health and pension programs, postindustrial patterns of work and the globalization of capital. We need new approaches that take into account the radical change in the nature of families, the role of women in the economy, and the reduced need for unskilled labor. The negative accountability effects of large public and private bureaucracies must also be countered. Neither the importance nor the political complexity of these changes should be underestimated.

But these steps will be inadequate on their own. The value of equality and the role of the state are crucial. Social democrats' great contribution to twentieth-century democracy has been their commitment to equality. Other important political values—political and civil rights, transparency, accountability—we share with other democratic movements. Equality, however, is ours alone. Social rights are our *raison d'être*. And without a strong, well-financed state, social rights are impossible. It is true that in the early years, having experienced Nazism and the Great Depression, social democrats were joined by others like Churchill, Roosevelt, and certain key Christian Democrats, who also saw the need for such rights and the corresponding need for the activist state. Now, however, almost all conservative parties have abandoned their social commitments. Furthermore, they have been joined by new parties whose narrow capitalist orthodoxy is even more intense. Neoliberalism has not only triumphed on the political right, it has also been co-opting the center. Bill Clinton's policies have been more conservative than Dwight Eisenhower's. The battle lines are now more clearly drawn. The chal-

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lenge to preserve social citizenship in the modern world rests with social democrats. And the stakes are high.

We must not be misled into thinking that the time of social rights has passed, that somehow they have become an obstacle or irrelevant to the "economic" requirements of the coming century. For neoliberals to say this is as historically absurd and morally offensive as it was for Leninists to have claimed earlier in the century that political and civil rights were a bourgeois encumbrance. Human dignity requires for its flourishing both sets of rights and their related sets of obligations. In order for us to continue the struggle against the world's neoliberals, it is important to understand how significant—and precarious—the social democratic legacy has been.

WE MUST NOT allow the more avaricious aspects of capitalism, particularly the dominant Anglo-American variant, to wipe out the great postwar social reforms. Policies that promote the removal of all "shackles" to the global movement of capital, now as in the nineteenth century, reveal the self-serving ideology of Western economic elites and the world's only superpower. Trade policies that enhance the mobility and property rights of corporations but ignore the human rights of millions of workers are not neutral. They tip the balance in favor of the few over the many. The elites that advocate such policies need to be reminded that earlier in this century laissez-faire capitalism denied real freedoms to millions, exacerbated class conflict, and contributed to the destruction of some European democracies while seriously destabilizing them all.

As the century closes, a large majority of the governments in the North Atlantic world are once again made up of parties traditionally on the left. They must use this moment in history wisely. Fortunately, many recent studies make it quite clear that neither economic globalization, nor slower growth rates, nor postindustrialism makes it impossible to sustain social rights. Quite the contrary, there is considerable evidence that shows states with strong social rights are better able to cope, have higher levels of productivity, and are more likely to have solutions to a world economy that is increasingly unstable. As it was fifty years ago, the principal challenge today is political.

Although the nation-state must devolve certain responsibilities both downward to civil society and outward to new global institutions in order to make corporations and investors accountable, in the foreseeable future the democratic state itself must remain the key instrument of power for ordinary people. Politics matters. With a continuing commitment by social democratic parties and leaders to the egalitarian essence of social democracy, there is reason to believe that the idea of social citizenship can indeed emerge victorious. There are no certainties in history. However, to live without illusion and still have hope is not such a bad beginning for the new century. ●

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'It's Business, Man!'

Unions and 'Socially Responsible' Corporations

Liza Featherstone

"How do you feel?" roared Jerry Greenfield, CEO and co-founder of Ben & Jerry's, the ice cream company that has (in the public imagination, at least) long epitomized corporate social responsibility. He posed this question a few years ago to the audience at the company's folk music festival, held annually in mansion-packed Newport, Rhode Island. "I feel good!" roared back the Teva-and tie-dye-clad crowd. (Greenfield opens the company's staff meetings with the same ritualized call and response.) The folk festival—featuring countercultural icons like Joan Baez and accessorized by petitions supporting legislation to "Save the Family Farm"—was vintage Ben & Jerry's. Greenfield's performance was designed to assure the festival's upper-middle-class audience that Ben & Jerry's, maker of flavors with trippy names like Cherry Garcia, is not a bunch of grim stuffed shirts in a boardroom, but a downright groovy (and ethical) little company. The skeptical observer, however, couldn't help wondering: what happens if you don't feel so good?

Last year, a group of maintenance employees at the Ben & Jerry's plant in St. Albans, Vermont, found out. These workers wanted time and a half for work on weekends and for any work that exceeded the standard eight-hour day. Company policy was to pay the federal minimum: time and a half only after forty hours have been worked in a week. (This means, for example, that maintenance workers might be scheduled for ten-hour shifts on the four days following Labor Day or Memorial Day, but collect no overtime.) In early November, after months of frustrating discussions with management, some of the maintenance workers, who earn, on average, about $17 an hour, approached the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' Local 300, and launched a campaign for representation.

Ben & Jerry's fought back. Asked how the company's anti-union campaign compared to those he's encountered from other, less "socially responsible" firms, Local 300's Tim Watkins, who coordinated the drive, called it "very aggressive." Some of the campaign followed a textbook union-busting formula: management held closed-door meetings with employees who had signed union cards, and told them that if they joined the union, they'd be spending all their time on picket lines, and would be "expected to go on strike at the drop of a hat," says Watkins. (This is untrue: unionized employees don't go on strike unless the shop has taken a strike vote.) The union filed no unfair labor practices charge with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), because, as Watkins explains, "they always stopped just short enough of illegality."

None of this is unusual; employers fight unions every day, and they fight them unscrupulously. According to analyses of NLRB data by Cornell labor researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner, about a third of companies have illegally fired union supporters during elections. In this context, the behavior of Ben & Jerry's certainly wasn't as bad as a company's can get.

But Ben & Jerry's had a formidable and complicated weapon at its disposal: a "socially responsible" image. Started in 1978 by Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, two longhairs who have been friends since junior high gym class, Ben & Jerry's is now a multinational corporation with more than 170 stores in the United States, and has been famously socially conscious for over a decade. The company's mission statement, written in 1988, advertises its dedication to the "new corporate concept of linked prosperity" and declares a "deep re-

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spect for individuals inside and outside the company and for the communities of which they are a part." Through the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, the company redirects 7.5 percent of all pretax profits to nonprofit organizations. The company's best-known campaign has been "1% For Peace," a crusade to redirect 1 percent of the U.S. defense budget to "peace-promoting projects." (A discontinued product called the "Peace Pop" bore a wrapper that explained this, but left many questions unanswered, such as, Why 1 percent? and What is "peace"?) The ice cream is sold in dioxin-free cartons. In February, Ben Cohen brought an eleven-foot ice cream pie to Capitol Hill to protest inadequate social spending and appeared on ABC's *The View* calling for cuts in the defense budget.

Ben & Jerry's argued that its employees didn't need a union because they had better-than-average benefits (including paid family leave and health club memberships, as well as three pints of ice cream daily). Central to the company's campaign, too, was the argument that the maintenance employees shouldn't be trying to organize a bargaining unit that included only themselves; all 150 workers in the plant, Ben & Jerry's lawyers argued, should be given the chance to vote on union representation. With this objection—the basis of Ben & Jerry's challenge to the union before the NLRB—Ben & Jerry's appeared to be promoting democracy in its workplace. But that rhetoric was disingenuous, because the union's support wasn't as strong among the production employees in the plant. Furthermore, the electrical workers' union was a logical choice for the maintenance employees because they are electrical workers. Had the production workers wanted to unionize, another union, one that had some experience in their field, would have been more suitable. In December, the NLRB rejected Ben & Jerry's challenge and ordered the union to hold an election.

In January, the maintenance workers voted for the union, eleven to eight, becoming the first unionized Ben & Jerry's employees in the company's twenty-year history. But Watkins says that the Ben & Jerry's campaign was so relentless that if the pro-union employees "hadn't been so solid, we would have lost them." Bargaining hasn't been easy, either; by early July, seven months after the election, there had been more than a dozen frustrating negotiation sessions, none lasting longer than three hours, and a satisfactory contract was nowhere on the horizon.

Lee Holden, a Ben & Jerry's spokesman, told me that the company's legal counsel had forbidden media interviews about the union during contract negotiations. (Lest this be taken as a lapse in grooviness, Holden was at pains to be super-friendly about it. "Thanks for understanding," he said, smoother than a sorbet.) The employees involved in the drive were equally circumspect, refusing, via Watkins, to be interviewed for this article, for fear of retaliation from the company. Watkins admits that these fears may not be completely justified, but the workers' reticence, considering that they have already won a union election, suggests an unusually hostile workplace.

GIVEN THAT Ben & Jerry's professes concern for—and even puts some serious money toward helping—the poor and marginal, the company's anti-unionism seems curious. But in balking at unions in its own workplace, Ben & Jerry's is far from unique among progressive employers. Businesses with an explicit mission of "social responsibility" (SR)— of which Ben & Jerry's is probably the most famously liberal—have been proliferating since the late seventies. In addition to Ben & Jerry's, such companies as Borders Books and Music, Starbucks, Noah's Bagels, Whole Foods, Newman's Own, Working Assets, and the Portland, Oregon-based Powell's Books have recently been mired in acrimonious labor disputes. "It's business, man!" says Marty Kruse, a used-book buyer and one of the initial Powell's organizers, who thinks it's foolish even to make an issue of SR union-busting. "We don't live in some anarcho-syndicalist utopia. If you're disappointed that they're resisting, you're being naïve."

"It's very frustrating," says Paul Couey, another Powell's Books employee and leader of its union drive, of the myriad paradoxes involved in organizing workers in an SR context.

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Employees and union representatives agree that when workers are trying to organize, a company's PC image is at best a mixed blessing—and sometimes a flat-out curse. The rhetoric of "social responsibility" can be a company's Achilles heel—laying it wide open to charges of hypocrisy—but it's also an insidious union-busting tool. Paul Mishler, a New York-based labor educator who has closely followed the Ben & Jerry's situation, puts it, "Being an unconventional boss can be used to justify being an undemocratic boss."

Like Ben & Jerry's, many progressive employers use their SR image against the union. This was certainly the case in the campaigns by booksellers and other employees of Borders Books & Music—efforts that started in 1996 and petered out last year. Founded by two Ann Arbor hippies in the 1970s, Borders is now the second-largest book retailer in the world. But when employees in Philadelphia, Chicago, Bryn Mawr, Ann Arbor, Harrisburg, Evanston, Des Moines, Seattle, New York City, and Stamford, Connecticut, sought union representation, the company skillfully evoked the long-running perception that it was a progressive company. Borders corporate flacks loudly touted the domestic-partner benefits the company offered to gay and lesbian couples (never mind that those benefits included a health plan most employees couldn't afford).

In numerous public statements, Borders officials praised the noble history of the labor movement but insisted either that unions were irrelevant to the contemporary workplace, or simply "inappropriate for Borders." In Philadelphia, where employees had petitioned to join the Wobblies (yes, a tiny remnant of the IWW still exists), one manager (a self-identified socialist) posted a flyer on the employee bulletin board headlined: "The Days of Joe Hill Are Over!" Of course, such posturing wasn't the only reason Borders ultimately wore down its agitators; the company also deployed the decidedly uncrunchy tactic of hiring Jackson, Lewis, one of the leading union-busting law firms in the nation, to stop the organizing. But employees agree that Borders' phantasmic liberalism helped management immeasurably. (Employees in Chicago, Des Moines, Bryn Mawr, and New York's World Trade Center did win their union drives, and even, in Chicago, Des Moines, and New York City, secured contracts. However, most of the victories were short-lived. Last year the Byrn Mawr union was decertified, and the World Trade Center's became completely ineffectual after employees voted to add an open-shop clause to the contract. The Des Moines union currently faces decertification, and no new campaigns are underway.)

More recently, employees at Powell's Books, a six-store chain in Portland, Oregon—who, at $7 an hour, were making no more than Portland's average fast-food worker, and had just been denied an expected wage increase—faced a similar, though more restrained, counterattack when they wanted to join the International Longshore and Warehouse Union's Local 5 (ILWU). Owner Michael Powell is a prominent progressive in Portland who is active in the local Democratic Party and an outspoken free-speech advocate. His bookstore is a favorite meeting-place for the Portland left, and at least appears to celebrate diversity of all sorts. This summer's in-store readings included lesbian poet Minnie Bruce Pratt and ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak, and the store's Web site is run in close partnership with the *Utne Reader*. So last fall, employees and customers alike were surprised that Powell fought the union. He sent out a letter to all his employees' homes accusing the union of corruption (actually confusing it with a different union); later, he campaigned against the ILWU's long record as a defendant in discrimination suits. "You say the word 'union,' and everyone's supposed to feel all squishy. I don't get it," Powell insists. "I understand if you're organizing farm workers, or people in Bangladesh. But this is not that kind of situation."

The union won in April, 161 to 155—a very close margin. Paul Couey, who works in the store's corporate accounts department, says Michael Powell's bluster hurt the union. "He [Powell] framed it as a human rights issue," says Couey. "He said the union would quell free speech. He used all this jargon that sounded progressive—saying that we were a small, organic institution, and could respond

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more flexibly [without a union]." (There's a grain of truth to this concern about flexibility. If Powell's really were committed to workplace democracy, the quirks of U.S. labor law could make it difficult for unionized workers to combine "management" and "non-management" roles. But there's no evidence that Powell is sincerely engaged with such complexities.) Says Couey, "Most of the flexibility to which he was referring was managerial. We wanted some flexibility in our own finances!" Because Powell was known to be progressive, employees were at first confused when he talked about unions in what Couey calls "such stereotypical" terms. "In early meetings, some of us felt that if we could explain it better maybe he would understand. But as it continued it became clear that he wasn't misinformed; it was a tactic."

Asked why he didn't simply agree to recognize the union after enough employees signed cards, Powell hesitates. "That's a good question. I thought about it," he says. "But it just didn't seem like the right thing." Powell claims that he didn't voluntarily recognize the union in part because some employees opposed it, though of course it was also because an organized workforce will make it "harder to compete in the industry." When I ask Alice Tepper Marlin, a founder of the Council on Economic Priorities, which tracks corporate social responsibility (and has showered Ben & Jerry's with adulation in the past), if she knows of any company that has voluntarily recognized a union "on principle," she laughs. "It would be very unusual," she says. Marlin looked through her files, and was unable to locate a single example of such an occurrence.

So what's going on here? Like New Age religion, that other cultural pathology of the 1980s, the SR business movement reflects that period's lack of left political vision and analysis. In its implicit notion that consumerism could substitute for politics—aptly reflected in the title of that Bible of corporate social responsibility, *Shopping for a Better World*—it was, at best, a lazy and naïve idealism. At worst, it cynically played on the reality that, in the 1980s, as now, many people were unhappy with a world centered around corporate profits, yet could imagine no alternative. It played on most Americans' desire to believe that capitalism, without any major, messy overhaul, could be a force for good, if only the people in charge meant well. The movement has spawned many of what futurist and SR guru Hazel Henderson calls "cleaner and greener" small firms, and increasingly, large corporations are jumping on the marketing bandwagon; even Wal-Mart is now a member of Business for Social Responsibility. The buzzword itself is revealing. "Responsibility" suggests that, like parents or benign dictators, people running businesses should make compassionate and sensible use of power—while the *fact* of that power should go unchallenged.

As prescriptions for social change go, then, SR is uninspiring, inadequate, and unambitious. But it's also a ready-made rationalization for union-busting; after all, if the people running the show are the ones who bear all the responsibility, and are cool progressive folks, why would workers need a voice of their own? Local 4's Michael Cannarella, who coordinated the Powell's drive, has organized many nonprofits "run by fairly liberal people." "The reaction is universally the same," he says. "'Hey, we're taking care of these people, how dare they?' It's like, 'I'm the dad, you're the kids.' Sometimes the more liberal they are, the worse their reaction to the union because they're the ones who take it the most personally."

Michael Powell, for one, has taken the union victory very personally indeed. "I thought I was a compassionate employer," he says. "I thought I tried to reward my employees as best I could. That point of view was rejected. It shakes your confidence in who you are and what your values are."

"Even employers who want to do good end up acting like employers," Paul Mishler observes. "That's why you need unions." As for employers who claim that they already treat their employees so well that a union isn't necessary, Mishler says, "That's like asking, would you need democracy if you always had a nice president? It's a silly question. The fact is that dictators always end up doing bad things, and employers are the same. Without a union [an SR workplace] is a benevolent dictatorship."

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Listening to Michael Powell, it's clear that either he's genuinely anxious that a pack of sweaty longshoremen are going to invade his genteel bookstore or, just as likely, he's playing on his workers' status anxieties. "We're not on the docks," he says. "I don't want an assembly-line work environment. I want to be able to talk collegially to my employees." Says Mishler, "A lot of people who emerged from that period of the sixties have this idea that middle-class niceness is better than working-class roughness. You know, 'they're not our type of person, they listen to the wrong music, they eat meat.'" Not only do such attitudes preclude these employers' empathy with workers, they inform a cornerstone of SR anti-unionism: the assumption that conflict itself is destructive. Borders' management, in trying to discourage employees from unionizing, continually disparaged unions as "divisive," and disruptive to company "culture." Such narratives exploit employees' utopianism; most people would like to believe in the possibility of a non-exploitative workplace in which workers' and companies' interests are the same. This is probably a pipe dream in firms without full worker ownership. But rather than inspiring employers at least to try to approximate such a vision, the rhetoric and practice of corporate socially responsibility actively undermines it.

STILL, THE outlook for SR employees who wish to unionize is certainly no bleaker than that for any other workers—and they do have some points in their favor. One advantage to organizing SR workplaces, for the union movement and for employees, is that it provides a political impetus to create better unions—these are employers that will call a union on a lack of democracy or other, often very real, political flaws. Michael Powell wasn't wrong to point out unions' history of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia—nearly every imaginable form of exclusion; such a history exists, and it's shameful. Having opponents with the vocabulary to recognize such problems is probably constructive for the labor movement. SR businesses, however vague their own politics, also tend to attract politically conscious employees, the kind of people who could turn out to be lifelong labor activists, and at the very least, could help unions to work in left coalitions and rebound as a political force.

As the first group of employees in the ILWU's new local, Powell's employees have the opportunity to create a democratic structure; it's a responsibility they're taking seriously as they draft their new local's constitution. The pro-union employees knew that choosing a decent union was crucial, not only because they knew that Michael Powell would play the "unions are corrupt" card, but also because progressive workers, far from being knee-jerk pro-unionists, tend to be skeptical about institutions. "When you're organizing a progressive business, it's especially important to have a [union] record you can defend—many unions really don't have a democratic structure," says Couey. "We would not have won if we had gone with a less democratic union."

At this writing, in early July, a contract seemed likely, but Ben & Jerry's was still refusing to yield to employees' overtime demands. Since overtime was the primary impetus behind the representation drive in the first place, failure to make any progress on it is a defeat for the union. "They've said they're not going to give in on that. But I'm going to sit down with them one more time," says the laconic Watkins, "and talk about some fairness issues." ●

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Talking about My Generation (and the Left)

Kevin Mattson

If the left hopes to remain vital, it needs to attract young people. To do this, it must take stock of the political and cultural experiences of the younger generation. Today, that means the world of what has been called Generation X. I know all too well the obnoxious ring of this term. At best, it has become a cheap tag devised by corporate advertisers; at worst, it has become a prop used in arguments for gutting Social Security and Medicare. Well-funded groups like Third Millennium suggest that since Gen Xers distrust the solvency of Social Security and Medicare, the programs should be abolished. So let me be clear: all I mean by Generation X is a set of young people who follow the baby boomers—people who are now in their twenties and thirties (which, for sake of disclosure, includes myself). One need not buy into all the silly speculation and over-determined talk about Generation X to see that it merits careful attention—its experiences tell us a lot about the potential future of the left.

So Long 1960s!

To say that members of Generation X have grown up with radical changes in the political landscape is banal. Not only have we witnessed the end of the cold war, we have witnessed the complete crash of modern liberalism. From the heyday of the Great Society—when liberalism triumphed in the realm of social policy and leadership—to now, the course has been sliding downward fast. I recently heard a self-confessed liberal say that we'd be lucky if we still had Social Security and Medicare in the near future. Liberals are hanging onto the last threads of the programs they instituted and watching as most of those threads—like welfare—unravel. This explains, I suppose, why so many liberals jump to the defense of Bill Clinton, who has done more to destroy the original liberal dream than Ronald Reagan (liberals know that there are worse things around the corner). Just as important as the decline in social programs, though, is the general mood and range of debates in America today. There's little serious discussion about public goods. Privatization as a catch-all answer to political reform dominates debate. Who would have thought that public school systems—which date back to the nineteenth century, after all—would be considered up for sale to experiments like vouchers?

Social policies tell half the story. It's not just that young people have grown up witnessing the shattering of the New Deal/Great Society paradigm that boomers grew up with, it's that the alternatives—libertarianism and market triumphalism—have insinuated their way into the everyday life of so many young people. The unregulated and all-powerful consumer market now defines the social lives of Generation X. The average child today has been subjected to 380,000 television commercials by high school graduation. Though baby boomers might be embracing consumerism just as much as Generation X today, young people don't have any experience with a world not saturated by this cynical form of consumerism. Worse still is the spread of consumer values throughout all of contemporary political culture. The libertarian dream of modeling all relationships on the basis of the market weighs heavily on people who have come of political age under Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. Conservative politics and everyday culture feed off one another.

In the face of these realities—the death of liberalism and the hyper-extension of a cynical consumer culture—the major hand-me-

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downs of baby-boomer leftism seem outdated and barren to most young radicals today. Take the case of New Left political criticism. The idea of a New Left relied upon some sort of unified vision that transcended the single-issue movements of the 1950s and 1960s—most important, the peace and civil rights movements. The critique that informed the New Left stemmed largely from the thinking of C. Wright Mills and William Appleman Williams. Drawing from an assumption that spread across the political spectrum during the 1950s—that liberalism was the dominant ideology of America (an idea found in the work of Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, Lionel Trilling, and others)—these critics argued to push liberalism to the left. The editors of *Studies on the Left*, an important New Left journal that was clearly influenced by Mills and Williams, explained to their readers in 1962 that "if the left" wanted "to play a meaningful role in American life it must cut itself free from the stifling framework of liberal rhetoric..." Liberalism, for these thinkers, had become the status quo, and they believed moderate liberals would steer the state far into the future. Unfortunately, this assumption was wrong: Americans had other ideologies at hand—including a nastier form of libertarianism and cold-blooded capitalism (couldn't the historians at *Studies on the Left* remember the Gilded Age?)—to make sense of their political world. Today, reading New Left political criticism, which assumes that liberalism is the main impediment to radicalism, is like reading obscure theological writings from an ancient world. New Left radicals helped push liberalism off the political map of America. Their assumptions and many of their writings make no sense to a generation that has grown up in a world bereft of liberal ideals.

If some key assumptions of New Left political thought became anachronistic, the hopes placed in youth and the counterculture—another legacy of the 1960s—became surreal. Social critics like Theodore Roszak, with their faith in the revolutionary power of personal liberation, have nothing to teach us. Today, the 1960s slogan "Youth Will Make the Revolution" sounds like a marketing cliché. After all, personal liberation has become the status quo; it is the mantra of our consumer culture (as Daniel Bell pointed out in the mid-1970s). Perhaps "dropping out" in the late sixties entailed asking questions about capitalism and a conformist culture; today, cultural rebellion inspires new marketing initiatives. Advertisers and Hollywood films encourage people to sneer at tradition—to openly embrace rebellion. To hear old counterculture types talk about doing battle with Puritan codes from yesteryear sounds bizarre. Turn on the television, and you'll get messages of revolution and personal liberation sold by Nike and Coke.

Another End of Ideology?

Unfortunately, the tendency to roll one's eyes at any mention of the 1960s has become all too easy among members of my generation. Whenever an elder starts talking about that decade, it sounds like "good ol' days" talk to so many of us. So the quick response is to ignore it without any attempt to discern what might be worthwhile or salvageable from that decade.

As is usually the case, we can learn much more from the past than our political culture assumes. There's a whole living legacy of practice and ideas that stem from the New Left. Organizations like Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee passed on a form of activism that many young people draw upon today, consciously or not. The politics of radical pressure—as Arnold Kaufman called it—was passed down to students who during the 1980s and 1990s demanded that their universities and colleges divest from the racist South African regime. The "teach-ins" devised in the 1960s have reappeared in the work of contemporary labor organizers, and the sit-ins of the civil rights movement have been taken up by anti-sweatshop activists on college campuses. And even though many of the debates from the 1960s seem antiquated, there is a great deal to learn from some of them. Whether it be discussions about the limits and possibilities of electoral politics, the strengths and weaknesses of participatory democracy, the corruption of the university by corporate pressures, the role of intellectuals in politics (de-

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bates originated by C. Wright Mills and heightened during the teach-ins), the ideological nature of talk about economic "prosperity," the potential and limits of civil disobedience—all of these areas of discussion have relevance. But they aren't being revisited, in part because baby boomers have a tendency to talk as if these are *their* things—their intellectual possessions. (Radicalism's late-1960s flameout also makes it difficult for us to remember the less strident activities and debates of the New Left's early years.) The real problem, though, is that Generation X pundits have created a new *Weltanschauung* of amnesia that takes the chaos of the late 1960s and turns it into an excuse to banish the past to the past.

In the minds of young pundits like Michele Mitchell, Rob Nelson, and Jonathan Cowan, the reason Generation X doesn't care about the sixties is because it is practical and focused and therefore less taken by violent confrontations than were baby boomers. In an interview, Mitchell contrasted the "large scale, grand visions" of the baby boomers with her own generation's down-to-earthness. Unlike the boomers, Mitchell argues in *A New Kind of Party Animal: How the Young Are Tearing Up the Political Landscape*, Gen Xers disdain partisanship and ideology; we want, instead, to do practical work on behalf of local communities. Cowan and Nelson, in a book on Generation X and politics which was as simplistic and shallow as most of them (though brazenly entitled *Revolution X*), used the "we're practical" mantra throughout. When they explained their generation to their readers, up went the clichés about the 1960s: "No fire hoses, tear gas, police dogs, or riots. Let's face it: Most of us aren't looking for unnecessary confrontation."

Individual volunteerism and community service—as substitution for the collective world of political action—are the central linchpins of this new, allegedly postideological politics. Instead of protesting or getting involved in electoral or community-based politics, the critics argue, young people feed the homeless or tutor disadvantaged kids in school or clean up polluted rivers. All of this, of course, is somehow outside the realm of politics or ideology. Statistics show that more and more young people perform voluntary service, and now the pundits have grabbed onto this fact and argue that it represents a new model of engagement. David Gergen, a middle-of-the-roader himself, noticed the rise in volunteerism and declared, "Contrary to myths that they are slackers, generation Xers are actually brimming with idealism." No wonder Bill Clinton used his service initiative (AmeriCorps) to attract disaffected Generation Xers; Elizabeth Dole's recent promotion of her own volunteerism follows suit. Generation X allegedly responds to this sort of message because we want immediate action and hands-on service—not the slow and conflictual world of political change.

Some hope that service will lead young people straight into the arms of politics. For instance, after tutoring disadvantaged students, young people might start asking bigger questions about more equitable school funding policies. Something like that happened to Jane Addams and many other young settlement house workers at the turn of the century. Their direct attempts to serve poor immigrants led them to push for national legislation like child welfare laws. But volunteerism doesn't operate this way in today's culture of narcissism. In fact, service can simply make young people feel good about themselves—believing their civic obligation has been performed in the act of ladling soup. It's the personal, individual, and authentic feelings generated by doing service that cheer young souls.

A recent report on youth volunteerism and politics by the National Association of the Secretaries of States (NASS) confirms this: "While youth volunteerism is on the rise, this involvement remains decidedly individualistic and apolitical." The NASS found no correlation between those who do service and those who vote or are politically engaged. These findings are given a human face in a story about Amber Coffman, a young woman who has combined the work of voluntary service (feeding homeless people in this case) and her effort to become state-wide beauty queen. In the *Washington Post Magazine*, John Fountain shows how hard it is to distinguish between

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Coffman's devotion to feeding the homeless and her self-promotion as a beauty contestant: "Amber's story is a particularly curious combination of selflessness, self-promotion, and social advocacy—for she is not only the quintessential volunteer, she is also a beauty queen with a strong taste for the limelight . . . . It's not as strange a combination as it may seem; in fact in some ways it reflects a fundamental truth about a society in which the celebration of self and the ethic of selflessness have come together." In reading about Coffman, you can imagine many other young people feeling good about doing service and simply stopping there (or better yet, running home to write it all down on their C.V.'s). As the pundits make clear, Generation X—standing proudly against the inherited spirit of the 1960s—disdains politics (or any collective and public activity) and craves authentic and individual experience. Its infatuation with service is the sort that makes sense within the context of a society that no longer trusts government or public life in general.

A New Conservatism of Mind?

In conservative times like our own, when practicality seems our highest value, social criticism often opens up new avenues of debate. To paraphrase Irving Howe, when things seem bleak, ideas, analysis, and the life of the mind take on a higher importance. Think of our last "end of ideology" phase—the late 1950s and early 1960s—when social critics like C. Wright Mills and Paul Goodman developed scathing critiques of American culture in widely read books like *White Collar* and *Growing Up Absurd*. Political possibilities looked pretty bleak to Mills and Goodman at the end of the 1950s. That's what made sociocultural analysis so important to them. They pointed to fissures in the cultural landscape by dissecting middle-class alienation, boredom with schooling, and the meaningless nature of work and career. Many of their ideas—including Mills's call to form democratic publics and Goodman's criticism of the schooling system—inspired 1960s activism. So now amid our own period of conservatism, where are our young social critics?

Before naming names, let's start with the obvious: the book industry of the 1990s is different from that of the 1950s. The book industry turns writers into overnight stars who might lack ideas but grin with marketability. Take Generation X's pioneering social critic, Bret Easton Ellis, who rose to fame during the 1980s. Ellis's first novel, *Less Than Zero* (1984), told the story of young, wealthy Los Angeles residents—making pointed criticisms along the way about the excesses of consumer culture, its superficiality and tendency to anesthetize young people. Ellis's characters were incredibly stunted, superficial, and ironical (diffident even about snuff films). There wasn't anything terribly deep about the work, but it propelled Ellis to the heights of punditry—he served as critical spokesperson for his generation in such venues as the *New York Times Magazine*. Soon, the immediate spotlight turned on Ellis highlighted his flaws. He started pumping out more novels that were seen increasingly for what they were: tedious and cheap attempts to shock his audience (Ellis never seemed to imagine that his readers were like his characters and therefore unshockable). All of this culminated in *American Psycho* (1991), which juxtaposed grotesque descriptions of murders with detailed accountings of New York City yuppie culture. Understand, Ellis is still viewed as a social critic by reviewers, but his one central idea is simple and monotonous: we are a culture immune to shock due to our consumer culture's superficiality. And yet Ellis sees no way out of this syndrome. He recently explained to a Rolling Stone writer what his writing is all about: "A kind of shallowness, vanity, narcissism, an obsession with surfaces, finding the truth in surface." Well put.

ELLIS'S SUPERFICIALITY highlights the most important features of Generation X social criticism—hip detachment and cool irony, an attitude that has become a fixture in contemporary popular culture. Douglas Coupland perfected this authorial attitude in *Generation X* (1992). Even with a story that ended with a touching bit of sentimentality, this novel simply mirrored the culture of consumption that it seemingly mocked. Coupland's characters, like Ellis's, were ironic

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and detached about the situations they faced in their lives—underemployment, too much television, downward mobility, and broken families. Characters never seemed truly damaged by the difficult situations they faced, just flippant and superficially supercilious. The reader became like the author—detached, but knowing, cynical, but still functioning. The critic's role was to remain smirking about a world fallen apart. Though Coupland pointed to America's wastefulness, there was little sense that he expected anything more than for young people to perfect their defensiveness against a (predictably) cruel world.

Like these other writers, Douglas Rushkoff has turned skimming the surface into a career in social criticism. Also a novelist, Rushkoff has taken more of a whack at straight-ahead social criticism. He's made clear his affiliation with this generation by editing the *Generation X Reader*. Rushkoff tries to speak for youth, a bit like Paul Goodman. But while Goodman worried about youth culture, Rushkoff quickly celebrates its most insidious elements. Like the editors at *Wired* magazine, Rushkoff fetishizes the Internet, computer games, and virtual reality. It's Theodore Roszak meets the computer chip. He celebrates non-linear thinking, as against the unhip ways of baby boomer parents. As he sees it, in *Playing the Future*, today's "screenagers" (his own annoying turn of phrase, which stands for kids addicted to computer games) are combating linear thinking and creating a "dynamic, holistic, animistic, weightless, and recapitulated culture." Whatever that means, Rushkoff likes it. He turns young computer game players into the foot soldiers for postmodern cultural liberation.

Beyond Generation X

Clearly, my generation is not about to produce a renaissance of the left. Our political critics are too enamored with pragmatic conservatism, and our social critics are too flippantly detached or too busy pining for the past. But this conclusion might be too pessimistic. Ironically, one source of hope might come from a simple and gloomy fact: Generation X is doing notoriously worse than baby boomers in terms of economic standing. One of the few interesting organizations to emerge recently, the 2030 Center, just issued a report entitled "When Good Jobs Go Bad: Temporary Work in the New Economy." The report documents how young adults face a new economy—one founded on temporary work with low pay and decreasing benefits. And those not yet young adults fare no better, as William Finnegan points out in his *Cold New World: Growing Up in a Harder Country*. That's why this generation might lend an open ear to a responsible left that focuses its attention on economic inequalities. This generation has heard enough about cultural rebellion from the corporate marketers and enough about the supposed glory days of the 1960s from burned out boomers, but not nearly enough about what might be done to make their economic future stronger and more just.

Additionally, we can't allow the general conservative mood in America—and the "end of ideology" ideas touted by Generation X political critics or the hip irony of social critics—to cloud the activities of young people actively engaged in the left. Loads of young activists have joined the labor movement via Union Summer, students are preventing their schools from carrying sweatshop clothing, and Gen Xers run a number of environmentalist organizations. Young activists are out there. What would benefit these movements is a critical reassessment of the New Left's legacy—a reassessment neither dismissive nor celebratory. We need a coherent discussion about what traditions and ideas young people can build upon. We need young historians and political thinkers who can sort through the wreckage of the past to assess what still lives today. These young intellectuals would not (because they could not) recount their own experiences with the New Left but would rather ask some difficult questions: what can we take from that time? What lessons from that era can we draw upon to make sense of our current political situation?

If we ever develop a political vision that can galvanize a young left (and I obviously have strong doubts), it will have to take into account this generation's wariness about big ideas with-

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out falling prey to the insipid "end of ideology" outlook of today's political critics. The sort of megalomania that the New Left fell into (especially during the late 1960s when "the revolution" appeared just around the corner) will never be our fate, and that is a good thing. We are too skeptical and jaded about political possibilities. But it's up to young social critics to crash through the generational stereotypes that have formed—those that peg young people as hopelessly cynical and forlorn about politics. At the same time, we must recognize that political skepticism can be healthy so long as it's more than just pragmatic conservatism. If it fails to make this clear to young people facing their political future today, the left will most certainly consign itself to the past, as it has too many times before. ●

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David Stern's Cosmos

Mitchell Cohen

FIGURES EMERGE from the thick of it. That is what I see in David Stern's art—and that is why I think of him as a painter not just for the end of the twentieth century, but for the beginning of the twenty-first. Here is a painter who ventures to draw out the human form after a very anti-human age. His purposes—as anyone can see—are not those of a draughtsman; he doesn't give us simple lines or sharply etched faces. Modern times haven't been marked like that. Nor is Stern's cosmos. Instead, there is a thickness of agitation; the canvas almost becomes an energized relief, moving toward us. Individuals materialize from surfaces that just could not be flat.

Faces emerge in the thick of things. Human form, it seems, must still be seen. It is reasserted by the hands of a German Jew after a century in which the fate of Jews at the hands of Germans—Germans led by a failed painter—became emblematic of the fracturing of common humanity. Are Stern's figures-in-the-thickness an attempt at retrieval? Stern says that he wants "to put the figure back together" in his paintings. He aims to do so, however, with a consciousness of history and art history. His desire: "to bring the figure back to life, the whole figure, but not on naive grounds." Those last four words are essential. Realist or naturalist resemblances would be beside the point.

And too easy. I am not the first to find a verve evocative of abstract expressionism in the movement of Stern's paint. Indeed, he maintains that "you cannot paint a figure today without taking the abstract experiments into account." Yet how do you take them into account if you want to put "the whole figure" back "together" on canvas? Abstract art, Meyer Schapiro wrote, comes of a deep "reaction to basic elements of common experience and the concept of humanity, as it developed under new conditions." Abstraction expressed individuality—"inner freedom and inventiveness"—and it thereby helped to "maintain the critical spirit." What gave "humanity" to art was not, then, solely representation of the human image or "natural shape," but an artist's "constructive activity, his power of impressing a work with feeling, and the qualities of thought." So humanity in art "may be realized with an unlimited range of themes or elements of form" and to label abstraction "inhuman" is "to underestimate inner life and the resources of the imagination." Abstraction translated inner life onto canvas by means of lines and circles, points and planes, this or that color combined with this or that brush stroke or gesture or streak.

BUT IF humanity in art deploys a wide range of themes and forms, then certainly the human figure itself reemerges legitimately as one of them, given other imperatives of imagination and critical spirit. For instance, an artist's constructive activity may strive to rejoin inner human verve to outer human image. "Rejoin" may not be a wholly adequate word here, if the aim is to bring "the whole figure" back to life. "Rejoin" suggests separation of "internal" and "external" domains of life. It is their interdependence that is suggested in Stern's paintings; an animating energy suffuses the sensuous, dense materiality of his paint. Yet that energy doesn't organize a simple picture for us. Stern makes demands of his viewers—his works require a pluralism of vision. Looking from one point of view, from a fixed place, is insufficient. As humanity doesn't emerge simply from the twentieth century, so one must engage the figures emerging

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in David Stern's canvases in complex ways, from multiple perspectives. They are not given to us "on naive grounds." Still, they must also be engaged on "common ground"—as Stern, not incidentally, entitled a series he painted after moving to New York.

"To appreciate an artist fully," David Stern believes, "you need to feel his locale." Stern was born in Essen in 1956. Although he didn't live the trauma of the Second World War, neither could he live at ease in its West German aftermath. It is hardly unusual for a modern artist to be at odds with the society around him, but here the stimuli of estrangement were potent. "In some ways," Stern says, "I wanted to belong, but I did everything so as not to." For five years, beginning in his teens, he was a communist—a clear way of saying, "I don't identify." It was, Stern reflects, a gesture for justice on his part, and he felt especially close to Party members who had suffered in the concentration camps. But the gesture couldn't last, and not only because it was youthful. Communists proposed the reorganization of society according to a preconceived plan and demanded mental orthodoxy. Look at Stern's paintings today—at the demands made of the viewer by their multidimensionality—and it is evident that communism could only have forged a vise for his spirit. Justice still matters to him, but now he speaks simply of "trying to be good," of the need to "carry on as mankind" despite this last century, of *Tikkun olam*—Hebrew for "fixing the world," making it aright, something different from stuffing thick human existence into a preconceived grid.

"Study of Random Cycles" — mixed media on paper, 1999. Courtesy Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art, Ltd..

Preconception is likewise at odds with Stern's artistic self-conception. "A true artist," he believes, "has to connect" but "never has a plan." As he rejected political orthodoxy, so he also turned from German artistic orthodoxies of the 1970s and 1980s. Conceptualism was the rage. The work of art was to be a function of an Idea and every artistic move had to derive from it, as if by master plan. "When I was in art school [in Dortmund and Düsseldorf], nobody was really painting . . . Everybody was busy with concepts." He adds that the idea of drawing figures, especially from models, was then anathema to his teachers. For Stern, however, it became imperative. And by making it so, he rubbed up against a basic problem for postwar German artists. In brief, how could one go back to rendering simply human images after the Third Reich had—in art as well as the battlefield—murderously degraded any notion of common humanity on behalf of a master race, of a monumentalized Aryan Man?

Stern's distinctive style emerged in the mid-1980s following a deep personal crisis (a "crisis of loss") and the subsequent growth in him of a new Judaic sensibility. Before this, he judges, he painted "dead images." Now, he asserts, they came "alive." As Stern's cosmos changed, he began using pigments and mak-

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ing his own paints. "Surfaces broke up," he says; he began taking the surfaces of his canvases to new places. And just as his painterly preoccupations were not an academic product—they had more to do with his engagement with the works of Rembrandt, Beckmann, Soutine, and Giacometti, among others—so Stern's Jewish commitments were "self-made" (his words) in that they came of his engagement with texts like *Pirke avot* (*Sayings of the Fathers*—a collection of religious ethical maxims) not Yeshiva instruction.

There has always been some ambiguity in the relation between art and Judaism. "The visual development of Jewish life," observes Richard Cohen in his book *Jewish Icons*, "has often been overlooked in the study of the Jewish past, reflecting the centrality of the written text and Jewish literary tradition." Moreover, the Second Commandment's proscription of graven images has led many to believe (erroneously) that art and Jewish existence have dwelled quite apart from each other. In fact, visual imagery has been a component of Jewish culture from antiquity on, as Cohen's keen inquiry into the place of art in European Jewish history shows.

The human image raises another subject—the nature of Jewish humanism. In one sense of the term, Jewish culture is animated by humanism because of its strong emphasis on the idea of the community. Martin Buber placed ethical demands at the core of what he called "Hebrew" or "Biblical" humanism. (Buber also argued that contemporary Jews should look back to the Bible much as Renaissance Italians looked back to Greek and Roman antiquity.) Drawing from the book of Genesis ("And God created man in his own image . . ."), Ernst Akiva Simon, one of Buber's students, sought to encapsulate Jewish religious humanism in the idea that "Man, who is created in God's image, takes away from God's dignity by losing his own."

What disfigured human dignity more than the Nazi bid to monumentalize Aryan Man? Can an artist reassert the human figure as an act of reclamation? For such an act to succeed, surely it must give us that figure without naiveté while upholding human kinship—perhaps by giving us figures and faces that emerge out of the thick of things, faces and figures and a cosmos that share a thick likeness. Here is where humanism, Judaism, and artistic vision come together in Stern's work. Three decades ago, in an essay asking, "Is There a Jewish Art?", Harold Rosenberg proposed that it was not Jewish themes or "style" that characterized modern Jewish artists (his concern was mainly American Jewish painters, especially abstractionists). Instead, it was a "will to identity," a nonconformism whose wellspring was deep within the Jewish experience but whose expression took form in artistic individuality. He was quick to add that "the metaphysical theme of identity" was not at all uniquely Jewish. Rather, it represented "the situation of the twentieth century, a century of displaced persons, of people moving from one class to another, from one national context to another." It was just that Jewish artists had felt this reality with special intensity, so their works were "loaded with meaning for all people of this era."

I THINK THAT this is also a way to approach David Stern's paintings. One of their cardinal themes—and Stern believes we all have "permanent life themes"—is the varied relations of bodies to each other and to space. Every figurative painter is of course necessarily preoccupied by these relations. But in Stern's work they are urgent, so very urgent. Placement and displacement are not simply aesthetic matters. They have been integral features of modernity, of our predicaments—and they will continue to be so, perhaps more acutely, in the globalizing era that is upon us. In the last quarter of a century the intellectual world has been abuzz with the idea that we have entered "postmodernity"—an epoch of fragmentation, of "differences" rather than universalism, of suspicion of the notion of humanity writ large. Stern's paintings resist this mindset, but not on behalf of a credulous nineteenth-century image of happiness and progress; humanity is plural but it is still humanity. Baudelaire spoke for Stern's artistic vision when he wrote that "modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable."

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Is it any wonder that New York, a city identified with modernity, energy, and motion became so vital to him? Stern speaks of New York as "transformative" and "liberating"—a New World. In the old one, he says, he couldn't paint street scenes. He finds in New York a "democratic experience unlike any other city." Here, the energies and potentials of individuals move together in public spaces. So his most recent canvases capture diverse New Yorkers afoot on urban pavements—plural humanity-in-motion, one might say. But Stern painted these after first looking up, and then looking down. Back in 1987, as his style materialized, he painted a series of "Studies for a Way." On these canvases—in this quest for his own way—we see dusky woods, imposing trees and underbrush, but with a whitish-gray wedge of (perhaps wintry) sky descending and dividing the natural density, as if pointing toward a solitary path in the thickets below. His initial reactions to New York took form as what he calls "Skypieces" or "Cityscapes." Dusky woods are now "canyons" of skyscrapers; and one can see a bright, cloudless, blue heaven descending, wedging tall buildings apart.

Inevitably, his brushes would pursue the city dwellers below. Not just on "Common Ground," but even underground. After all, what aspect of New York life is thicker than the subways? Stern gives us New Yorkers next to each other, their bodies stationary in the space of a subway car—which is moving. This dialectic is captured, not surprisingly, thanks to the movements of Stern's thick strokes. When we reemerge above ground for Stern's new paintings, plural humanity strides toward us through urban reaches, sometimes with the blue of cityscaped skies above, sometimes with the gray of a rainy day. People of every skin tone come toward the viewer. These New Yorkers are not anonymous figures in the scheme of an urban planner, but embodiments of human energy—which still carries on after the painting has been finished. The point is not to present New York to the viewer in a literal sense. These subways and sidewalks are urban paths in an exploration of embodied space, of bodies in spaces, of placement and displacement. These random New Yorkers have become part of Stern's quest for the human figure—a figure that is transient yet always there.

At times, Stern's human images seem to play hide and seek with the viewer, and the closer one moves toward the canvas the more one may be tempted to jump in to discover them. Yet, if one moves back a little and looks from here or there, they will emerge out of the thickness. That thickness is not painterly surplus or indulgence, but something shared by those figures—and by the viewer, this writer, and, of course, the artist. On his canvas, David Stern's cosmos and his complex visual imagination interface. ●

MITCHELL COHEN is co-editor of *Dissent*. This essay was written for the catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition of David Stern's paintings opening October 12 at Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Arts at 115 Wooster Street, New York City.

Q What do you get for the person who has everything and knows nothing?

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The Second Sex at Fifty

Vivian Gornick

This year *The Second Sex* turns fifty. Now deep into my own middle age, I reread the book in the wake of thirty years of thought and feeling much influenced by its steady presence among us and I find, turning its pages, that the question on my mind is not, "How does it read?" but rather, "How did it get written?"

In the 1989 Vintage edition of *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir's biographer, Deirdre Bair, tells us that in the fall of 1946, when

> Sartre was under sustained verbal attack in Paris... [de Beauvoir] believed she could defend [his] positions... by writing an essay in which she defined herself personally as a woman and philosophically as an existentialist. Her intention was to relate them both to Sartre's system, which she had accepted unquestioningly as her own. . . .In order to defend what she believed were Sartre's universal principles, she had to begin with the specific and the individual, which in this case was her role within his system. . . .One idea began "to emerge with some insistence" from her thinking. It brought her to "the very profound and astonishing realization" that she was different from Sartre "because he was a man and I was only a woman."

In a 1982 conversation, Bair goes on, "she explained what she meant by 'only' ":

> I had not yet settled on the idea of woman as the other—that was to come later. I had not yet decided that the lot of woman was inferior to the allotment of men in this life. But somehow, I was beginning to formulate the thesis that women had not been given equality in our society, and I must tell you that this was an extremely troubling discovery for me. This is really how I began to be serious about writing about women—when I finally realized the disparity in our lives as compared to men. But [in 1947], none of this was clear to me.

In 1947 none of this was clear to her. She was thirty-nine years old. She had been out in the world as Sartre's intellectual companion for twenty years. She knew everyone, went everywhere; experienced herself as a person who spoke, thought, and moved freely. But now, setting out to write a simple analysis of her own life that would demonstrate the truth of Sartre's philosophy, she found herself coming up against a stumbling block around which there seemed at first no easy way out—and then no way out at all. When it came right down to it, she realized, she was first and foremost a woman; that reality undercut almost everything she intended to demonstrate. It struck her forcibly that the condition carried more weight than she had previously been willing or able to understand. Throughout the history of the race, she now saw, people who were women had systematically had less power, less standing, less definition. They were, in fact, what Existentialism called "Other." The condition of birth into which she herself had been born was the single most powerful determinant in the shaping of a life consigned to organized subordination. To not see this, the "otherness" of your life, if you were a woman, was to live in a permanent state of fantasy.

De Beauvoir came up against being a woman in much the same way as James Baldwin—in the same year, in the same city—came up against being black. Although Baldwin had scorned the intellectual torments of postwar Europe—after all, they'd brought it on themselves, hadn't they? —it was impossible to be living in Paris in 1948 and not absorb the endless discussion of existentialist categories. Baldwin, too, began to see that he

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was "Other"; and then he saw that the idea of the "Other" was something he could make use of; turn it this way and that to concentrate all the better, all the more exactly, on what it meant to be black. Conversely, de Beauvoir had begun by wanting to use herself only to make the case for Existentialism but had ended with a radically changed perspective that also concentrated itself on her own "otherness." In the case of Baldwin, this application of the "Other" led to some of the most extraordinary essays in American literature. In the case of de Beauvoir, it led to a monumental work of rediscovery that would, twenty years later, help usher in the second wave of Western feminism.

The story of how *The Second Sex* came to be written is in itself a prototypic tale of how modern feminism has proceeded to make use—every fifty years or so over the past two hundred years—of the conversion experience of one "brilliant exception" after another—starting with Mary Wollstonecraft in England, leading on to Elizabeth Cady Stanton in America, and then on to de Beauvoir herself in France. Each of these women began her thinking life as an ardent partisan of a powerful social movement connected with a great war (the Enlightenment, the antislavery movement, Existentialism), and each of them, living a heightened life inside the visionary politics that had sparked her intellectual being, came, in turn, to see that she was "only a woman." The contribution each then made to feminist understanding turned, appropriately enough, on an application of the central insight of the movement to which she was devoted. Wollstonecraft urged passionately that women become rational beings; Stanton that every woman exercise governance over her own inviolate self; de Beauvoir that women cease to be "Other."

Once de Beauvoir "got it" she became brilliantly, comprehensively obsessed: the more she read the more she thought; the more she thought the more she read. Her research was formidable, her concentration unparalleled. The picture widened and deepened, reaching back into biblical times, forward toward the end of her own century. How "woman became woman" began to encompass large notions of Destiny, History, and Myth-making; as well as even larger analyses of women in our own time as a group of people prepared from birth to become the Desired and the Protected, but never the Independently Acting. There had not, she observed, been a time when the social history of the human race did not posit man as the central actor on the stage of life and woman as his sidekick.

Why? she asked herself again and again—but could come up with no adequate answer to the question. Nothing—not biology, not materialism, not psychoanalysis—could explain to her satisfaction why woman had become the permanent subordinate of man. At last she concluded that the answer lay in the "imperialistic" nature of human consciousness. It craved subordination; wherever and whenever it could, it created the "Other" in order to oppress it. As good an explanation for that which can never be "explained" as any—and one that led her into a wealth of observation that, to this day, we do not tire of responding to. Whether with gratitude or outrage.

In English *The Second Sex* runs to more than seven hundred pages, in French many more (the English edition is famously cut). The book is a magnificent piece of obsession on the grand scale: every resentment hounded to earth again and again. ("I have seldom read a book that seems to run in such concentric circles," Alfred Knopf said of it. "Everything [is] repeated three or four times but in different parts of the text.") At the same time, the book is written in a tone of voice remarkably self-distancing. The author of *The Second Sex* is at pains to put space between herself and her subject. She knows the condition whereof she speaks *intimately* but make no mistake, reader, she does not share it. Women—in this book written by a brilliant and angry woman—are distinctly "they" not "we."

The rub, for de Beauvoir, was what she saw as the collaboration of women in their own fate. Blacks had submitted, but women had complied. It was the complicity she found unbearable. Throughout history they'd been relaxing like a cat into the subordinate condition; more than relaxing; endorsing the ar-

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rangement, sharing in the conspiracy, stupidly happy to remain slaves. She could not associate to it. The whole thing made her ill. As ill as it made Doris Lessing, whose *Golden Notebook*—the other major work on women written in the first half of the century—is a catalogue of grievance and self-hatred also delivered in a voice of angry scorn that separates the one writing from the ones being written about. (If it comes to that, Mary Wollstonecraft, writing in 1796, is also in a rage at those whose long withheld rights she is setting out to vindicate.)

Yet how could it have been otherwise? For women like Lessing and de Beauvoir, women's rights was the intellectual ghetto. It is amazing enough that they delivered themselves of these encyclopedic accounts of the condition of their own sex. For them to have placed the materials of a woman's life at the center of serious works of intellect and sensibility was in itself an astonishment.

But it is interesting and important to note that the only American visionary thinker equal in intellectual stature to the Europeans—Elizabeth Cady Stanton—wrote "we" not "they" from the first minute she put pen to paper—it is not until "they" transmutes into "we" that you've got a movement—and that is why feminism belongs to America. Much as they burned over their second-class status, it was impossible for the European intellectuals—from Wollstonecraft to de Beauvoir—to give up their overwhelming longing for acceptance in the world of men (such was the strength of European culture internalized). This longing—erotic in its power to compel—bound them heart and soul to a dividedness of will that was crippling. The American visionaries, on the other hand, hardened their hearts against the romantic pull of worldliness—and eroticized feminism (such was the power of the democratic promise outraged). Women's rights became their single-minded passion. This made them incomparably more undivided in their pursuit of equality—and incomparably more revolutionary. Thus, although feminism is rooted intellectually in Europe it is only here in America that it takes hold and becomes a movement.

In 1947 de Beauvoir began a now famous affair with Nelson Algren. The affair came as a revelation for her. With Algren, she said, heart, soul, and flesh were one. She was alive in her senses as never before. It was the kind of feeling for which most people gladly "give up everything." But Simone deBeauvoir was not most people.

Just months into the affair Algren asked her to marry him and move to Chicago. Reluctantly, she refused him and explained,

> The reason I do not stay in Chicago is just this need I always felt in me to work and give my life a meaning by working. You have the same need, and that is one of the reasons for which we understand each other so well. You want to write books, good books. . . I want it too. I want to convey to people the way of thinking which is mine and which I believe true. I should give up travels and all kinds of entertainments. I should give up friends and the sweetness of Paris to be able to remain forever with you; but I could not live just for happiness and love, I could not give up writing and working in the only place where my writing and work may have a meaning.

One way or another she repeated these words a number of times over the years, and when she did, she seemed often to be saying, "Give up Paris? Give up French? Give up Sartre?" Her severest critics pounce on this construction, as though it is proof that the most famous feminist of the century was, finally, just another woman in thrall to the Great Man. I find this reading appalling. What is true is that it's hard to pull those sentences apart. For her, I think, they actually were of a piece. Taken together they did mean a definition of self that turned on work.

They were not good people, neither she nor Sartre—ruthlessly self-absorbed, sexual predators, always needing to exert power over those within their orbit—but they were passionate about the life of the mind, and for each of them, writing was a religion. Whatever else Sartre did to her or for her, the association with him was irrevocably bound up with the idea of work. Indeed, his presence in her life was iconic, and she seemed often to be worshiping the man himself. But I don't believe she was. Crudely put, in a bid for independence

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on the part of a woman born in France in 1908, devotion to one man promised joy of the body, devotion to another man joy of the mind. That was the best she could do. She made her necessary—her distinctive—choice.

And it seems to me it stood her in infinitely better stead to hold work rather than love as a first value. It made her a better human being (the same cannot be said for Algren, a thin-skinned man, easily humiliated, capable in his neediness of cruel and reckless raging). In her letters to Algren, de Beauvoir never whines, pleads, threatens, or insults; no matter what is happening between them, the letters open with love and close with warmth. Out of them can be intuited the woman who applied herself to the task of researching and writing a report on the condition of her own sex with so much passionate steadiness that she transformed a polemic into one of the great books of the century. ●

VIVIAN GORNICK's latest book is a collection of critical essays called *The End of the Novel of Love.*

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Foreign Policy and Left Priorities

A Reply to James B. Rule

Ian Roxborough

JAMES B. RULE invites the left to think carefully about foreign policy, and in particular about the use of military force by the United States ("On Evils Abroad and America's New World Order," *Dissent*, Summer 1999). We should accept Rule's invitation to debate; he is pointing us in the right direction. But the dilemmas he describes will be more difficult to solve than his essay suggests.

Rule's article has two main parts: in the first section he demonstrates, correctly, how U.S. military expenditures have not fallen much from their cold war levels. In the second he discusses the principles on which U.S. military intervention ought to be based. The two parts are linked by an implicit assumption that defense spending during the present period of "peace" ought to be substantially less than during the cold war.

However, it may cost *more* to keep the peace than to wage a cold war—even if we accept Rule's claim that the United States should drastically reduce its global ambitions. Peace does not keep itself; it requires institutional arrangements for deterrence, for the resolution of differences, and for the enforcement of the norms of the international order. The process of developing a post–cold war institutional order has moved forward hesitantly, and on a largely ad hoc basis. As the biggest player, the United States has played a central role, and without U.S. participation other nations have been reluctant to act. The result is that U.S. military expenditure remains at roughly its cold war average. Rule is right to note that there has been no "peace dividend."

But I believe the central problem is less that military spending has not declined substantially from cold war levels than that the United States is maintaining the wrong kind of military force. We need to go deeper into the debate that Rule has opened and ask *what kinds* of military forces the United States should pay for.

Rule is right on the mark when he demands that we ask for what purposes the United States should employ military force. We may not all agree with his answer, but there can be no doubt that this is the fundamental question. There is also a corollary question: against whom, and how, might U.S. military force be employed? And what kinds of military forces should the United States therefore develop?

Rule suggests stringent criteria for the use of American military force. Although his general argument is that this can be done with perhaps half the current level of military spending, his list of occasions in which the United States might use its military forces is, in fact, quite expansive. He lists "[t]hreats of imminent use of weapons of mass destruction, genocide or other large-scale losses of life, flagrant violations of elementary norms of international conflict (including invasions), imminent threat of environmental disaster (for example, nuclear contamination), and grave dangers to democratic and pluralistic institutions."

This is not so different from current American practice. The difficulty is that the present level of military operations is stretching the U.S. military to the limits, producing a wear and tear on U.S. military forces that is hard to sustain.

In some instances, as Rule says, considering questions of feasibility will stop a proposed operation in its tracks. We should oppose the use of military force if it is unlikely to produce the political end state desired. But we might wish to create the military capabilities that would allow certain kinds of action to *become* feasible. It would be desirable, I think, to have the military capability to halt an invasion in a

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matter of a day or two. It would be desirable to have the capability to rapidly stop ethnic cleansing. At present the United States does not have such capabilities. They could be acquired. They would cost money.

The current American military machine is a strange mix of deadly, high-tech weapons mounted in a cumbersome organization that takes weeks and months to deploy to trouble spots. Smart bombs are sent on their way by an intelligence and targeting system that has hardly changed since the cold war.

At present the overwhelming bulk of the military is designed to fight a large, conventional conflict, using armor-heavy forces and high-tech weapons, against a similarly equipped enemy. This was the cold war template, and the war against Iraq in 1990-1991 served merely to solidify this as the war-fighting method for the post–cold war period. Such wars are now unlikely. The United States needs now to organize its military for different scenarios. At one end of the spectrum, there is a need to deter future armed conflict with rising regional powers such as China (and possibly a resurgent Russia). This is best done with diplomacy and by developing air and naval forces that can deter through a credible, technologically sophisticated strike force. Since any threat of this kind will not arise for several years, the main military effort now should go into innovation and experimentation, rather than procurement. A rapid strike force will also be needed for use in emergencies, such as situations where ethnic cleansing is beginning, or where a civil war is about to break out, or where a democracy is about to be invaded by a foreign power. In such circumstances it would be desirable to have the capability to intervene militarily with decisive force in a matter of days. The United States does not have this capability at present, even in such relatively accessible places as southern Europe and the Middle East. This, and concern about casualties, forces the United States to rely too heavily on air power. The United States should develop a global strike force as a matter of urgency. All this will cost money.

At the other end of the spectrum, the United States will probably decide to intervene, much as it has done in the last ten years, in trouble spots around the globe in a variety of peace and humanitarian operations. The left is likely to support many of these interventions. What kind of military force does the United States need for this? The first requirement is to strengthen and expand an already costly logistical and communications capability. Refueling tankers, transport aircraft, and satellite communications are the first priority, not tanks and artillery. A second requirement is a large force of lightly armed constabulary troops to keep the peace. They will need special training and equipment, and they should be a hybrid between civilian police, aid workers, and light infantry. Such a force does not exist at present. Its creation is an urgent necessity. It will cost money.

THERE *ARE* savings that can be made. First, there is a lot of pork in the defense budget. Bases the military does not want are kept running because local congress members don't want to lose votes. Weapons are manufactured in order to generate employment in the home districts of congress members. The tentacles of the military-industrial complex have reached deep into American society, and digging them out will require sustained effort. Although much of the responsibility for this lies with our elected leaders, the pressures from within the military for the procurement of baroque weapons are immense. We should demand major reform of the Department of Defense and of the procurement process.

A second way to cut military expenditures is to drastically reduce many of the forces that were configured to fight the Soviet Union. Many large armored forces could be turned over to the Reserve and National Guard. American forces stationed in Korea and Germany could be eliminated. It is not clear that it will be wise in the near future to invest too heavily in manned aircraft and in aircraft carriers. But the bottom line is that peace may be just as expensive as the cold war, and perhaps more so.

The heart of the matter is, as Rule says, not the budget as such, but America's sweeping ambition for world hegemony. Frequently

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allied to both moralizing and humanitarian impulses, American micro-management of global affairs generates resentment and enemies. Rule is surely right that we should attempt to move the United States toward the goal of becoming a "normal country." One way to do this is to attempt to detach the inevitable position of world leadership from ethnocentric moralizing and crusades to remake the rest of the world in America's image. I'm not sure that we on the left have a particularly encouraging track record on this. ●

IAN ROXBOROUGH is professor of sociology and history at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

James B. Rule Responds

MY FRIEND and colleague Ian Roxborough draws from a fund of expertise in military matters rare among our *Dissent* circle. He properly points out some unanswered questions in my exposition; let me try to return the compliment.

Two kinds of issues are at stake here—technical and political. Roxborough argues that "it may be more costly to keep the peace than to wage a cold war," and goes on to detail how U.S. military forces and procurement would have to change in order to meet this challenge. As a matter of military calculation, all this is convincing.

So far, then, so good. But how do we know that the purposes that will guide future applications of American military might will indeed involve "keeping the peace" in ways that *Dissent* readers would endorse? True, one can point to heartening examples. Most of us, for instance, have been relieved that ethnic cleansing in Kosovo could be blocked at costs that appear—thus far, at least—acceptable. But how do we know that the next venture in American arms will not involve something vastly less acceptable—for example, propping up disagreeable regimes in Mexico, Turkey, or Saudi Arabia? Such ventures would no doubt also be packaged by American elites as "peacekeeping operations." And how do we know that future humanitarian disasters like the one in Kosovo will be deemed worthy of the attentions of American geopolitical planners?

The fact is, we simply don't know who the next "freedom's enemy of the month" will be. The left doesn't come close to choosing the targets for application of U.S. military muscle; we hardly even have a distinctive position in these matters. Instead, we mostly find ourselves, after the fact, reacting to the use of an outlandishly expensive military establishment constituted according to principles few of us would want to be associated with. ●

JAMES B. RULE is professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

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Minors and the First Amendment

Replies to Marjorie Heins

Jean Bethke Elshtain

MARJORIE HEINS has written an intelligent but predictable polemic in favor of "free expression" for those she variously calls "youngsters," (this excludes "little ones" though how little we are not told), "older minors" and, of course, "teenagers" though her argument in favor of nigh-unlimited access to any and all materials through any and all media extends to the "youngster/older minor" category as well ("Rejuvenating Free Expression," *Dissent*, Summer 1999). We know this is a polemic because those who oppose her views "fulminate" rather than argue, so I suppose what I am about to argue will be taken by Heins as yet another fulmination. Here goes anyway.

Heins scorns "paternalism" and "protectionism." These, for her, include any and all attempts to limit access by children to certain sorts of materials. "Youngsters," Heins declares, are "citizens" with First Amendment rights rather than "fragile creatures in need of protection. . . ." But this doesn't tell us much, for Heins casts her net so widely it becomes unclear whether she would ever favor any attempt by concerned political, social, civil, or parental bodies to block, inhibit, or prohibit particular images or words. Are any and all such efforts to come under her generic term of opprobrium—"censorship"? Presumably so.

I would never want to defend all the particular actions Heins criticizes. It makes little sense to me to yank either Marquez or Angelou from high school libraries. But surely there are serious issues of political judgment involved in some of the examples Heins proffers in order to condemn any attempt to create a more *civil* civil society by restraining certain sorts of materials. She refuses to discriminate between what might be called easy and hard cases. Taking *Madame Bovary* out of a school library and blocking Nazi hate sites on the Internet are treated indiscriminately, if we follow the logic of her argument. Surely most of us would want to distinguish one case from the other.

Discriminating between types of cases, materials, and media is not Heins's strong suit. Nor does one find much in the way of nuance in her underlying (and under-argued) presuppositions and basic categories of analysis.

Take, for example, the term "free expression." If, as Heins notes, correctly on my view, "terms like pornography and gratuitous violence are infinitely elastic," what are we to say of "free expression"? This is surely the Plastic Man of categories. When our Founding Fathers penned the First Amendment they had in mind limitations on political speech and the free exercise of religion, not the "right" of a "youngster" to shout "Adolph Hitler Rules!" in a high school corridor. To be sure, constitutional adjudication cannot be limited to the Framers' intent. But the terrible irony nowadays is that the proliferation of junk and trash talk and images of human sexual degradation and bondage and Internet instructions on how to blow up your high school wipe out serious political and civil discourse rather than enhance it. If the lesson learned by those "youngsters" Heins is so determined to protect from the "protectionists" is that anything goes, the first thing to go will be what Mill and other historic articulators of liberalism called the "soft voice" of reason. And this will be in the interest of crass money-making in most instances rather than anything that remotely resembles promoting civil or political "content." Heins is so lathered up about the "classifiers" that she acquiesces in, even celebrates, a public world portrayed as one big unrestrained, overheated stew pot—not quite from nursery

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to grave (presumably one needs to be toilet trained before one can exercise all one's "free expression rights") but pretty close to it.

Do we really face a "censorship juggernaut"? If you are a First Amendment absolutist, even attempts by parents to organize consumer boycotts against sponsors of programs that traffic in violent or damaging content presage a Berlin Wall of control. If you are a democrat, however, such parents are doing what people in a democracy do—fighting with the political means available to them against a much more powerful foe (big business and big television) to protect (okay, I'll use the word) their children from materials they deem inappropriate or even damaging. In denying to citizens the right to act in the public arena in order to inhibit certain materials that overwhelmingly lack civic or political content—Heins herself is writing from a kind of lofty Guardianship stance. Heins variously trounces or blows kisses in the direction of the courts, depending on whether or not they have done the bidding of free expression absolutists or not. The European Parliament doesn't escape her wide net of excoriation for it, too, is guilty of trying to inhibit the enlightenment of "youngsters" by "rating and blocking of Internet sites." I wonder: does Heins believe that it is an unacceptable blow against the precocious decision-making capacities of pre-teens for Europeans, who find it a bit more difficult to forget the experience of fascism than do Americans, to block anti-Semitic, anti-foreign drivel on the Internet? Presumably so.

Oddly enough, Heins never addresses the issue of violent material of an explicit nature in any detail. Violence gets mentioned as part of a shopping list of materials she taxes the "censors" with wanting to limit or block. But let's get down to brass tacks, especially in post-Columbine High School America. Does Heins have no problem with unlimited access on the part of "youngsters" to sites on weapon and bomb construction? Does she see no merit in trying to limit the voluptuaries of violence? Being American, Heins's obsessions are primarily sexual, so let's go to a sexual question. What about explicit pornographic Web sites involving youngsters? Is the only concern a pragmatic cut-off point having to do with age? Are there no other concerns with moral and civic sentiments that might kick in as we conjure with such matters? If, as Heins claims, "teenagers are sexually active the world over," there should not, in her world, be any problem of any kind with materials depicting sex acts between "youngsters," so long as they are not "little ones."

There is nothing we can do save to sit back and enjoy the ride, it seems, and in clear conscience, too. For Heins associates her position with one that seeks to protect children from the "harms of censorship" at which point follows a wholly unsubstantiated list of harms. (And remember that censorship, for Heins, is any attempt to limit access to any materials *or* any media where "youngsters" or "minors" are concerned.) This list includes promoting "feelings of powerlessness; training in authoritarianism; shame or confusion resulting from taboos on erotica; indignation at the firing of a good teacher, banning of a good book, or aborting of library research on a sensitive topic by mindless filters." What's wrong with this list? First, Heins presents not a single shred of evidence that V-chips or something similar inculcate powerlessness or authoritarianism. She presents no evidence that limiting access to any and all sexually explicit materials leads to shame or confusion. If there is such evidence I'd like to hear about it. Teenagers "need" all the stuff the "protectionists" want to limit, she claims, for their "development." On what account of development is this so? Psycho-sexual accounts? Cognitive accounts? Ethical-formation accounts? Civic-sentiment accounts? The only evidence that I know of suggests that overwhelming children at too early ages by too much stuff, especially of an egregiously sexual or violent nature, has an inhibiting effect on subsequent development, but maybe I've been reading the wrong writers. So what are her sources here?

Second, note once again the sleight of hand in which taking a "good book" out of the hands of youngsters becomes the example of what the "protectionists" want to do. Heins presumably recognizes that if she said "take images of slaughtering members of minority

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groups on the basis of Nazi ideology" out of the hands of youngsters, our sympathies would tilt toward the "censors."

Finally, let me just note that Heins's argument is deficient in that quality Hannah Arendt considered crucial for democratic public life, namely, the faculty of judgment. Arendt resolutely opposed the premature politicization of the young, by which she meant pushing kids prematurely into the midst of controversies of the sorts Heins aims to promote. Why? Because this premature immersion makes for a kind of hardening of destructive forms of identity in children before they have had the opportunity for development within a somewhat protected *cordon sanitaire* afforded by home and school. Government does have a stake in preparing children "to fulfill their future duties as citizens." But a democratic society doesn't do that by depriving parents of the most basic right of all, the right to rear their children according to their own lights. If parents are stripped of their authority in relation to children, Arendt continues, the result will be more conformity rather than less, because it is almost impossible for children to resist the pressures of peer groups.

In other words, it isn't adults that kids need to be spared from—it is the overbearing and overweening coercive power of peer group conformity. By stripping parents and teachers of their tasks in relation to their children—tasks of nurturance, guidance, and, yes, protection—one also strips them of the responsibility that is theirs. It is difficult to exercise responsibility if there are all sorts of Guardians around trying to protect children from those charged with the daily tasks of seeing to their welfare. Heins thinks "youngsters" can, out of the dizzying array of words and images—many of them stunning in their explicit violence and representations of human beings in demeaning and degraded positions—somehow develop into good citizens. With this Arendt would strenuously disagree. She warns against the tyranny "of their [the children's] own group, against which, because of its numerical superiority, they cannot rebel, with which, because they are children, they cannot reason, and out of which they cannot flee to any other world." Heins would leave "youngsters" alone with their rights, *sans* adult "protectionism." The upshot over time, Arendt would insist and I would agree, will not be more freedom but less. ●

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Amitai Etzioni

THE WAYS societies view children have changed a great deal over the generations. Authoritarian societies tend to see minors as adults in all ways other than in their small stature. These societies presume that children assume responsibility for their acts. Children are tried as adults, jailed with them, and hanged next to them. In contrast, civilized societies treat minors as a distinct legal and moral category, as developing creatures who gradually become adults but are not; adults are expected to help children develop into mature young people able to form their own judgments.

Marjorie Heins, in her article "Rejuvenating Free Expression" (*Dissent*, Summer 1999), draws on the traditional view of children to advance the harmful proposition that children have First Amendment rights like adults. Whenever she finds that her proposition is unsustainable, she temporarily takes cover behind the civilized view that children constitute a distinct category, only to strike again. To keep her thesis even temporarily alive she performs the lawyerly trick of referring to social science studies that support her case, ignoring all others; and—most surprisingly—she invents children's First Amendment rights against their parents!

Heins opens by arguing that several court cases limiting the kinds of material teachers in public schools can expose children to—leav-

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ing private schools, parents, and media to fill the void—treat children "as fragile creatures in need of protection from controversial or 'immoral' ideas rather than [as] citizens possessed of First Amendment rights." The key word is "citizens," which negates any difference between children and adults. A page later Heins makes her point even more explicitly: "youngsters, like adults, possess free-expression rights." Period. Just in case one did not get the point, Heins elaborates mockingly, "Children in American political mythology have become tender innocents, incapable of conceiving a corrupting thought unless it is thrust upon them. . . ." As I see it, the ideas that children are vulnerable, requiring some initial protection, and that if they have "corrupting" thoughts adults should help them sublimate them in socially constructive directions rather than encourage them, are the mark of a civilized society. Indeed, it is something parents and educators do routinely, and very unmythologically.Why is Heins so keen to leave children unprotected from all the vile and violent stuff the media and the Internet dish out? Because she believes arguments that minors need some protections are actually "a shorthand for suppressing ideas and subjects that are considered immoral and offensive." Here she may have a point. Some ultraconservatives—and several feminists—would like to ban certain sexually explicit materials altogether. However, the battle against such moves can and has been fought without sacrificing children.

HEINS REFERS to the works of psychologists to support her various points, especially her claim that under most circumstances violent media imagery does not harm children. Her notion is that exposure to vile and violent material can actually provide a catharsis to twisted instincts rather than implant them, provide them with detailed designs to make their actions more harmful, or urge those who succumb to such instincts to act. However, anyone who does not set out like a lawyer to make a case by any means and ignore all counter-evidence would acknowledge that there are numerous studies showing that children are indeed harmed.

Whenever Heins senses that she is about to lose her readers, she quickly—but temporarily—admits that little children, maybe those four or younger, may not posses the same First Amendment rights as adults, that they are developing creatures rather than adults able to make discriminating judgments on their own. For a moment she comes up with a very reasonable standard: that as of age fifteen or older the presumption should be against excluding the material to which young people are exposed. But by the next paragraph we are back to "younger children" and minors. The age at which protection of minors should be reduced is the crux of the matter, the place where the current public policy and legal issues are being fought out. At what age to draw what lines?

The American Library Association rules and laws in several states bar librarians from disclosing to parents which books their children read *at any age*. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), with which Heins is associated, went to court to demand that public libraries remove filters introduced to protect children *twelve years and younger*.

An approach that truly builds on the civilized notion that children are developing creatures would gradually liberalize their exposure as they mature, protecting especially well those in primary school or younger; it would continue to shield those in junior high school (approximately ages eleven to thirteen) rather extensively, and gradually reduce such protection thereafter. Access to violent material (especially detailed designs for destruction and programs that explicitly glorify mayhem) would be more limited than to sexually explicit material, about which both conservatives and civil libertarians tend to obsess.

Above all, Heins's notion that children have First Amendment rights against their parents must be laughed out of court. Heins includes in her "censorship juggernaut" items such as "v-chips, Internet rating and filtering schemes, [and] 'explicit lyrics' labels on popular music." These items help parents and educators to guide children.

Parents not only have a right but a duty to help shape the education of their children, to help them choose which books they should read, which music they should listen to,

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which television programs they should watch, and which to avoid. If a classmate of my son has committed suicide, and my son seems depressed and is spending long hours alone in the library, it is my duty at a minimum to find out if he's merely reading Dostoevsky or if he's perusing the Hemlock Society's how-to books. I also had better find out if one of my children is deep into *Mein Kampf, The Anarchist's Cookbook*, or *The Unabomber Manifesto*, so I can help him learn to deal properly with these poisonous works.

Helping children to develop the moral and intellectual faculties needed to make responsible choices when they grow up is what raising kids is all about. Anybody can provide room and board, and love comes naturally. But developing a child's character is a parent's highest duty—a duty no civil libertarian should interfere with. ●

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Marjorie Heins Responds

ELSHTAIN AND ETZIONI respond to my argument for minors' First Amendment rights with the same highly charged rhetorical devices that have brought our culture to its current state of hysteria over the need to "protect" youth from presumably harmful speech. Substituting gratuitous insult for reasoned analysis, they contribute little new to the debate; but they do illustrate the emotionalism and failure of careful line-drawing that has led to the present impasse.

Etzioni, for example, inaccurately claims that in discussing catharsis I fail to acknowledge the "numerous studies showing that children are indeed harmed" by "media imagery." On the contrary, my article says that "recognizing the power of catharsis" is "not intended to deny the obvious fact that the media do influence attitudes." More important than Etzioni's carelessness, though, is his failure to specify what "media imagery" or type of "harm" he has in mind. It is precisely this habit of sweeping generalization, this failure to recognize the complex, varied ways in which the culture combines with other influences on human behavior, that has led to V-chips, Internet filters, and other blunderbuss censorship devices as symbolic non-solutions to social problems.

In a similar triumph of rhetoric over analysis, Elshtain conjures up "images of slaughtering members of minority groups on the basis of Nazi ideology" as an argument forwhat? She does not explain how the suppression of hateful ideas will advance the moral and intellectual development of young people or—the question at the center of my article—who is to make the judgments, in a censorship system, about which images and ideas have political, artistic, or sex-educational value, and which do not. (Elshtain objects to the word censorship, but it merely means restrictions based on the content of expression, which she and Etzioni clearly favor.) Elshtain agrees that removing Márquez or Angelou from high school libraries "makes little sense," but she does not explain what system she has in mind for distinguishing their works from the "Nazi hate sites" she would block. Who is to look over the shoulders of the thousands of filtering company employees or Web industry monitors to assure that they don't censor the anti-Semitic sentiments of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot along with other "hate sites"—or, for that matter, information about the Holocaust, gay-bashing, slavery, or lynching? Elshtain and Etzioni assume that some institution or agency will make the right distinctions (in accordance, of course, with *their* tastes and judgments); my point is that no such godlike agency exists, as the history of censorship demonstrates. Indeed, under Elshtain's standards of bad speech ("junk and trash talk") versus good speech ("serious political and civil discourse"), she herself would apparently censor much "political and civil" debate because it is not sufficiently "serious."

Etzioni's example of a suicidal adolescent also illustrates the problem. He attempts to distinguish a reading of Dostoevsky (presum-

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ably safe) from "the Hemlock Society's how-to books." But Dostoevsky's novels, like many others, contain riveting descriptions of violence and mayhem. Is Etzioni so sure that his vulnerable teenager won't get bad ideas from Dostoevsky, the Bible, *The Silence of the Lambs*, or *The Merchant of Venice*? Wouldn't it be better—as Etzioni indeed suggests—to help youth "learn to deal properly" with troublesome issues in art and entertainment through education?

HERE, WE THREE seem to agree that education —"nurturance and guidance," in Elshtain's words—is the best way to develop critical thinking and moral judgment in young people. Where we differ is on whether nurturance and guidance necessarily include censorship, on the value of free expression to both individuals and civil society, and on the extent to which parents should be able to inculcate values that depart from majoritarian standards. For, in what is the grossest of their distortions of my argument, Elshtain and Etzioni accuse me of trying to interfere with parental autonomy. On the contrary, it is censorship devices, whether criminal laws or Internet filters installed in schools and libraries, that deprive parents of choices.

It is true that at some point—as I think even Elshtain and Etzioni would agree—youngsters do have rights against their parents (cases of physical abuse, for example). Should a minor be able to override her parents' choice to withdraw her from school after eighth grade (the situation in the 1972 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case involving Amish parents)? Etzioni would apparently give parents carte blanche to "develop a child's character" in whatever manner they choose. In an illogical ad hominem, he adds that "no civil libertarian" should interfere with parents' rights in this area; but of course it is civil libertarians who have long been the primary defenders of parental autonomy against the interventions of a protectionist state.

Etzioni's defense of parents' role leads to his next error: his assumption that V-chips and Internet rating and filtering systems are exercises in parental choice. In fact, they are exercises in parental *abdication*—of the responsibility to know and discuss with youngsters what they are reading and viewing. Etzioni's accusation that I disfavor parental guidance of children's reading or other media consumption is thus totally off base. But these mechanical filtering devices are imaginary quick fixes, in which large, vague categories of expression, including much that we would probably agree is valuable, are hastily if not mindlessly (in the case of keywords) blocked from view. Neither I nor the civil liberties community is guilty of violating parental rights by pointing out the many defects of rating and blocking technology.

Etzioni is also wrong in implying that the ACLU's successful lawsuit challenging a public library's installation of Internet filters interfered with parental choice or with the "protection" of children under twelve. The filters in that case—mandated by Loudoun County, Virginia—were an exercise in governmental fiat, not parental choice; and they blocked a vast amount of valuable online material for *adults* as well as minors of all ages.

The oversimplified dichotomy with which Etzioni opens his reply is equally inaccurate. "Authoritarian" societies, he says, treat children as adults; "civilized" ones treat them as a "distinct legal and moral category." People in a "distinct legal and moral category," however, still have rights, as I hope even Etzioni would agree. Does the Supreme Court's recognition of minors' First Amendment rights in the 1969 black armband case render the United States an "authoritarian" or "uncivilized" society? Is the United Nations, with its Convention on the Rights of the Child, likewise to be condemned as uncivilized?

IF ANYTHING, Etzioni has it backward. Viewing free expression and access to diverse ideas as conducive to the development of critically thinking democratic citizens is hardly characteristic of authoritarian regimes. Democracies recognize the rights and interests of children and adolescents precisely because of their respect for human dignity and diversity. It is authoritarian societies that are more likely to impose censorship in the interests of "protection." The tendency of politicians and spin doctors to blame such complex phenom-

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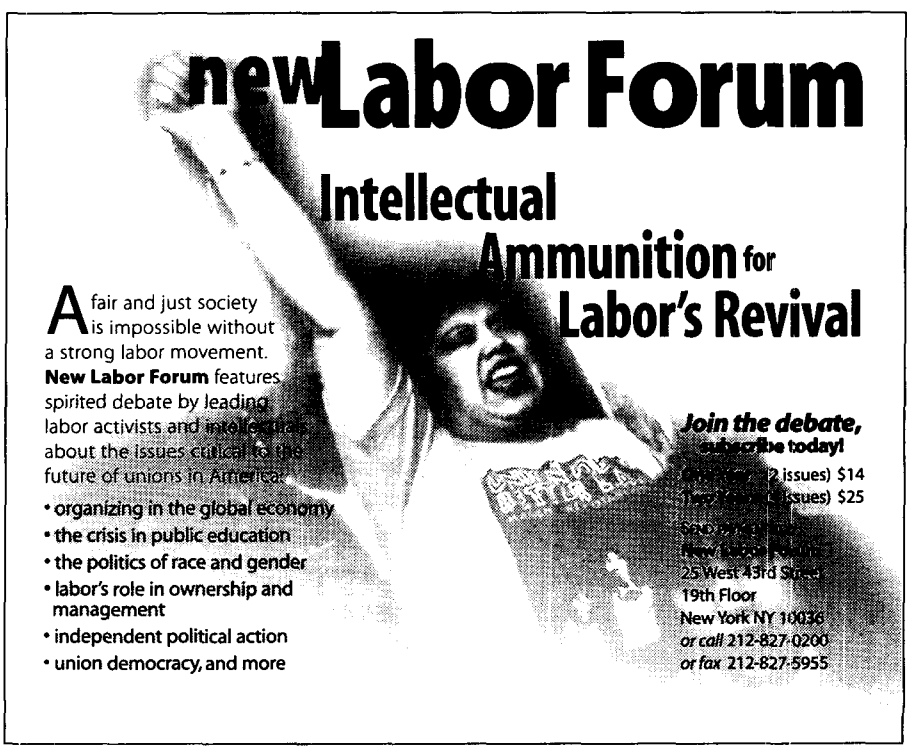
ena as the mass killing at Columbine High School on rock music, television, or video games is a disturbing development in American political culture precisely because it is more characteristic of authoritarian than democratic thinking.

When not excoriating me as an authoritarian, Etzioni and Elshtain brandish an epithet that, in our current political climate, is perhaps even worse—"First Amendment absolutist." I am not an absolutist, however; indeed, the term has little meaning in the free speech context. Extortion, bribery, perjury, and employment discrimination—all accomplished through speech—are not protected by the First Amendment. Laws against defamation, invasion of privacy, threats, and harassment are also in my view legitimate forms of censorship. They are legitimate because these categories of speech cause direct, tangible, and focused harm. Laws against obscenity or indecency, on the other hand, or mandatory Internet filters that block expression touching on violence or sex, are based on generalized notions of moral or symbolic harm. The question that my article poses—and that Etzioni and Elshtain ignore—is whether, if the "harm to minors" that is thought to flow from controversial, disturbing, or "trashy" ideas is fundamentally moral or symbolic, would not education, nurturance, and guidance be more likely than censorship to produce responsible, open-minded citizens?

As far as one can discern from their overwrought prose, Elshtain and Etzioni would deny minors any free expression rights. Thus, in their scheme of solicitude for youth, minors could be expelled from school for wearing armbands, publishing independent newspapers, writing bawdy jokes on their Web sites, visiting a disapproved Internet venue, or reading a banned book. If this is not what Elshtain and Etzioni advocate—if they do accept that minors are entitled to First Amendment protection—they utterly fail to explain what restrictions they think are justified, for what age groups, and why. It is precisely the difficulty of fashioning a censorship system that does not end up suppressing Márquez and Angelou that underlies my argument in favor of free speech for youth. ●

MARJORIE HEINS is writing a book on whether censorship is necessary to protect kids, to be published by Hill & Wang in 2001.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The Major Myth of the Women's Movement

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

THE RECENT publication of two biographies of Betty Friedan, and the media attention the books have drawn, make this an apt moment to reflect on the myths about the women's movement that some on the political left as well as the right have accepted for the past thirty years.

As an activist, scholar, and writer focused on the dynamics of sexism, and an associate of Betty Friedan's for three decades, I must confront one of the most serious of these myths: the view that the women's movement was created by white, middle-class women, led by white, middle-class women, to defend the interests of white, middle-class women. This view is now so commonly accepted that feminist activists routinely cry mea culpa for neglecting women of color and of the working class. The accusations and the apologies are ill-placed.

The two biographies of Friedan, one gossipy and personal by Judith Henessee, a journalist, and the other a scholarly work by Daniel Horowitz, a historian, have revealed that she was not "just a housewife," but was a labor writer for ten years preceding the writing of *The Feminist Mystique*, and was a left-wing advocate for workers' rights before that. Horowitz suggests that she betrayed this past in *The Feminine Mystique* by characterizing herself as a middle-class housewife who discovered "the problem that had no name"—women's lack of identity and purpose when not employed outside the home. Horowitz's suggestion—really more of an accusation—is that Friedan would have accomplished more had she written a frankly political book with a focus on the race and class issues confronting American women. He doesn't say what impact this might have had on the women's movement, but like many writers critical of the movement, he believes it ignored the needs of working-class and minority women. Horowitz rightly surmises that Friedan was cautious about offering a left-wing agenda in a book aimed at a popular market in the aftermath of the McCarthy era. But he fails to credit her for bringing the more basic issues of sexism and inequality to public consciousness.

In the fifties and sixties the term "middle class" was a point of identification for working-class as well as middle-class women—for black women too, striving as they did to move from domestic labor into the white collar world. At the same time, the term "housewife" was what the sociologist Everett Hughes called a "master status" for nearly all adult women. Being a housewife or being characterized as one defined women more than any other status they might have. As Alice Rossi wrote in the Americans for Democratic Action's *ADA World Magazine* in 1971, "a fundamental assumption of American society is that men's primary social roles are in work and women's primary social roles in the family... [A]ny suggestion that [women] feel ambivalent about maternity, marriage or homemaking" is so disturbing that the public's responses range from a "shiver of distaste to a convulsion of hate." Friedan had identified the fundamental social and self-stereotyping affecting all women and acting as a brake on their opportunities to achieve equality in American society.

The facts of history are lost to some critics. *The Feminine Mystique*, the work of a journalist with high exposure to the social sciences, laid out the problems women faced in post-World War II suburban ghettos or in the symbolic ghettos of sex-labeled jobs and subordinate roles in public life and in the family.

Friedan's book was a call to awareness, not

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a call to arms. That was to come three years later when she would form an organization to promote women's issues and the ideas she had advanced. Her demand for women's liberation was echoed by other women who, like her, had participated in or were psychologically prepared by the civil rights movement and the student revolts of the 1960s. With the now famous Friedan in charge—her book had sold a million copies and she was lecturing all over the world—a new women's movement took root. It aimed at targets in all social classes and it fought to establish equality for women at every rung of the ladder—from working-class women to those who aspired to high office in politics and the economic sphere. The *New York Times*, reporting on the nationwide Strike for Women's Equality called by Friedan for August 16, 1970—the fiftieth anniversary of U.S. women's suffrage —commented that the National Organization for Women (NOW), the largest group in the August 16 coalition, "works to change the basic social structures by working for the Equal Rights Amendment and lobbying for federally funded day-care centers." Led by Friedan, tens of thousands of women marched in New York, "mostly women of all ages, occupations and viewpoints" according to the *Times*—and they were copied throughout the country. The *Washington Post* reported that the marchers in the capital were made up of "Weatherwomen, black women, League of Women Voters members, women of the peace movement, Black Panthers and religious orders."

The *Post* reported that speakers at the rallies condemned sexual discrimination by labor unions, by the medical profession, by churches, and in school curricula and advertising. They "advocated liberal abortion laws, peace in Vietnam, greater opportunity for black people and an end to the capitalistic system." The *Post* quoted the African-American leader Jean Wharton of the Washington Teachers' Union, "The women's liberation movement . . . concerns black and white women . . . because it's against a racist, capitalist system that oppresses all blacks, all women and all workers." The composition of the marches and rallies held coast to coast that day reflected the heterogeneity of Friedan's allies and comrades in arms.

I was a participant in those early days, a member of the New York City Chapter of NOW at its founding in 1966, standing among the women and (a few) men Friedan recruited to march, agitate, and explain in every forum open to us what equality might mean in practice. The fights Friedan would have with some members of this group (who later split into separate factions) were usually about organizational structure or strategic emphasis. Friedan felt then that issues of sexual identity were diversions from NOW's main program. "This is not a bedroom war, this is a political movement," she maintained. Friedan was unwavering in demanding priority for women's economic security, autonomy, and equality and for changing the stereotypes of women's "nature." "If we can change what happens in the day," Friedan asserted, "the night will take care of itself." The Statement of Purpose Friedan wrote for NOW pointed to race discrimination and the need to work for civil rights for everyone. She wrote about discrimination in factory jobs, the need for job training, for equality in labor unions, and economic security for housewives.

OF COURSE, all of our memories are suspect. The "truth" is more complicated than the version usually reported by ideological purists or those whose writings are aimed to "sell." We all remember and interpret our experiences through the lens of the current moment. Thus I thought it would be informative to reflect on the movement's early days in conversations with Friedan and a few other veterans of those times. I also dug into dusty files to document and reconstruct the agenda of the past—locating news clippings and articles, as well as transcripts of the testimony I gave (at Friedan's instigation) before the Equal Economic Opportunities Commission (EEOC), the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, and various congressional hearings in 1967 and 1968.

As movement veterans whose lives crossed in the sixties, we thought back to the time when after work hours, in living rooms and offices, an unorganized and shifting group of women and a few men struggled to come up

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with an agenda and a plan for activism. Friedan had a talent for drawing media attention to the basic issues and assembling a diverse group around her. The March for Equality was an example. We recalled others.

When we met this past summer, we reminisced about the NOW group that rode a bus to Albany to persuade the legislature to include a provision for sex equality in the state Constitution. Standing in a group in front of the state capitol, Friedan—ever the political strategist—moved Ti-Grace Atkinson to the front because, though she was a struggling graduate student, she looked elegant in her fox coat. (A patron of the Philadelphia art museum, where she worked, had given it to her.) But the rest of the group hardly cowered in the back. "Put Sex in the Constitution," read a placard distributed to us by the radical black lawyer Flo Kennedy. Others in the group were writers, lawyers, businesswomen, union officers, government workers. Some were at the same time wives and mothers.

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THERE ARE postmodernist writers today who believe they have discovered the idea of fractured identities, but they have never applied it to an analysis of the woman's movement. Feminists in the sixties were very aware of their multiple and contradictory personalities. If one was (as I was) a graduate student or a writer, one also might be a wife and mother—and even if not, the feminine mystique might creep into your psyche, suggested by parents, a faculty committee, an employment agency, or your friends. Was Betty Friedan really a writer concerned with the oppression of workers, blacks, and yes, women, and not really a middle-class housewife? Well, she was both, and so it was with many of the activists in NOW whom she mobilized.

But more important, did she and the early activists in NOW devote their efforts primarily to middle class women? Hardly. According to Friedan the main drive, insofar as there was a set of priorities in those early chaotic days, was to strengthen the economic role of women. But Mary Jean Tully, the first president of the NOW Legal Defense Fund, told me in another conversation that "everything needed to be done—there was no plan—we responded to the issue of the moment." Nevertheless, "the first legal cases were all for working class women" Muriel Fox, an early officer of NOW, recounted in a recent speech. These were cases for factory workers denied promotion and seniority, for stewardesses who were fired when they married or aged beyond thirty-five.

The feminist group around Friedan focused on the problems all women faced, and one of the first among them was limited access to the occupations dominated by men, whether as apprentices on a construction job or candidates for a congressional seat. One marcher in the Women's March for Equality was Eleanor Holmes Norton, the African-American congresswoman, then chair of New York City's Commission on Human Rights. Addressing the Fifth Avenue marchers, she declared, "Give us the right to compete. ...Give us the right to live, the right to a job regardless of sex." From the start Friedan argued that the stereotypes that defined women affected all women: women of color as well as white women; working class as well as middle class women; Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. As Friedan pointed out in *The Feminine Mystique*, even social scientists who should have known better participated in the stereotyping process, and dismantling the stereotypes became an ongoing part of the agenda for women in the movement.

THE IDEA of an organization to advance women's goals did not originate with Betty Friedan. As she told me, the idea came from Pauli Murray, a black lawyer (who later became one of the first female Episcopal priests). Murray met with Friedan to propose "an NAACP for women," and urged that the new group follow the model of the civil rights movement.

Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with Title VII prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, seemed the dawn of a new age, but there was concern that it would not be implemented. Friedan had been making forays to Washington, partly under the cover of a new project—a sequel to *The Feminine Mystique*—to see what was happening. Dor-

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othy Haener of the United Auto Workers was part of a new Washington group, as were Catherine East and her colleages in the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, who had been collecting statistics to show the discrepancies in employment opportunities for men and women. Richard Graham, director of the EEOC, invited Friedan to meet behind closed doors to urge her to create public pressure because, she remembered, the hands of the EEOC staff would be tied unless demand grew for implementation of Title VII. Friedan had also been contacted by women eager to start mobilizing. Some of these did so covertly—women in government agencies such as the Women's Bureau who were nervous about losing their jobs if they were seen as too activist, but who had done ground-breaking work in documenting the employment inequities women faced. The EEOC became a leading instrument in creating job tracks for working class and minority women and men.

FRIEDAN WORKED with the EEOC, supplying some of the "experts" who would testify about the consequences of sexist practices on women workers. I was one such "expert." I had been researching and writing a dissertation analyzing the causes of women's exclusion from work defined as male (which later narrowed into a study of women in the legal profession). I was asked to speak about the consequences of segregating help-wanted ads into "male" and "female" categories—a practice then common in newspapers. Along with the social scientists Sandra and Daryl Bem, I was able to show how the segregated ads defined good jobs as male and dead-end jobs as female.

The EEOC eventually took on American Telegraph and Telephone (AT&T), the largest employer in the United States apart from the federal government. One million people worked for the company, which placed women and men, blacks and whites on distinctive tracks—the women as telephone operators (with a very few becoming supervisors of operators) and the men in crafts jobs with opportunities to rise within the organization. People of color were stuck in menial jobs, with no hope of rising. The settlement AT&T worked out with the government was groundbreaking. It noted the need for opening employment tracks to women and minorities, the dismal prospects these workers had for advancement or specialized learning; and it was a warning to other employers that they too must be sensitive to the rights of women in the workplace.

Of course, the women's movement has suffered accusations for more than its supposed middle-class focus. Today a spate of venomous articles and books from writers in conservative think tanks and in academic life blame the feminist movement for the disintegration of the nuclear family, for men's irresponsibility toward family and child support, for the high rate of divorce, and for women's supposed inattention to works of charity and community service. These are the works of simplistic analysts who ignore the variety of factors that contribute to changing social trends and disregard the indisputable advances in the position of women in American society today. They also ignore the strengths society has been given by the women who made this peaceful revolution. ●

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Can We Have College for All?

Tara Zahra

NINETEEN NINETY NINE was a tough year to be a college-bound high school senior. College admissions were more competitive than ever. "It's kind of a college mania, with suburban schools sending 70 percent to 80 percent of their students to college," Robert Zemsky, director of the Institute for Research on Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *New York Times*. "Other routes into the workforce are withering. Vocational education has been nearly cut in half. This is the wave accompanying the globalization of the economy."

The number of students enrolled in four-year institutions is at an all-time high—14.8 million registered for this fall, up from the record 14.6 million last year (some 65.6 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college in 1998). "We have finally opened the doors of college to all Americans," boasted President Clinton in his most recent State of the Union Address.

But will this national obsession with higher education amount to anything more than an upper middle-class bonus check to itself? Will elite institutions that promise to "diversify" reach out or simply further the stratification of American society?

Although it is true that college enrollments are increasing, the 30 percent gap between attendance rates for the richest and poorest Americans has remained stable since 1972, according to a 1999 study from the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP). Low-income students and those who are the first in their families to attend college are also less likely to finish their degrees and more likely to attend technical, two-year, and community colleges, exacerbating the gap. James Marisotis, president of IHEP, says that contrary to popular perceptions, "We're seeing very little social mobility."

Recent trends in financial aid policy promise little hope of reversing these inequities. Although more and more students receive financial assistance, state governments and institutions are facing increasing pressures to replace need-based financial aid, which is based on parental income, with "merit" aid, which is typically based on students' grades and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. At the same time, the most elite institutions have begun a virtual bidding war for high school academic superstars, with Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Dartmouth, and Brown all announcing more generous packages in the past two years. The implications of those decisions for accessibility to higher education may not be as positive as press releases claim.

Since only approximately 3 percent of the nation's undergrads attend elite private institutions, the most immediate impact will be felt from changes in the way aid is allocated by state and federal governments. Still, the policies of elite schools are not irrelevant to the issue of social mobility. "Every step of financial aid that moves away from need-based aid with equity in packaging affects everyone in the whole food chain of colleges. If Harvard were to change its packaging it would change the whole system in this country," says Paul Thiboutot, Carleton's dean of admissions. Taken together, policy changes on both levels reveal a wavering commitment to need as the primary basis for giving out scholarship dollars nationwide, as market incentives infiltrate policy making.

The IHEP report found that over the past two decades, need-based grants have covered a decreasing percentage of the average price of attending college. This is largely due to rising tuition costs, with which institutional,

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state, and federal aid programs have not kept pace. But it is exacerbated by the rise of merit aid through immensely popular (and expensive) state programs modeled after Georgia's HOPE Scholarship fund. (The HOPE scholarship, funded by a lottery, provides tuition and fees at all in-state public colleges, or a portion of tuition at in-state private colleges, to all Georgia high-school graduates with a minimum B average in high school who maintain a B average in college.)

For example, Louisiana's TOPS program cost taxpayers $62.4 million in its first year—nearly double the expected bill, largely because TOPS added children of the wealthiest third of Louisiana taxpayers to the scholarship rolls. These students wouldn't have qualified for need-based aid. At least ten other states are considering similar programs, many of which have no income cap. Whereas a recent report from the New York State Higher Education Association shows that nearly half of U.S. states increased overall spending on need-based aid last year, growth is slower than in the early 1990s, when there was an average increase of 10 percent annually. In Georgia, where the merit trend first caught on, financial support for need-based aid fell from $5.3 million in 1994, when the HOPE program began, to $2.2 million in 1997.

If that's not bad enough, the HOPE program is in fact means-tested for the poor. The state doesn't want to use funds on students who will be taken care of at the federal level. So Georgia high school seniors must apply for federal need-based programs (like Pell grants) before the state will give them a cent. Whatever they get from the feds is then deducted from their HOPE scholarship. That means that a poor student whose tuition at a public state school is covered by federal aid gets a maximum of $150 a year from the HOPE fund for books (about enough for books for one class at most schools). It's not surprising that HOPE recipients come from families 40 percent wealthier than the state average.

Meanwhile, President Clinton continues to argue for a nationwide HOPE program, and used the label "Hope Scholarship" for his 1998 tuition tax break plan, which also benefited mostly middle- and upper-middle-class families. Because it was a tax credit, the one-third of all families who are too poor to owe any taxes get nothing. Likewise, students who pay their own way through college—over half of all college students—don't have enough tax liability to qualify. These programs give the most to students who need it the least. And yet, they are sacred cows for many politicians because of their popularity with middle-class constituents. "They'll stop building roads before they'll stop funding this program," according to Joseph Savoie, the Louisiana commissioner of education in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

THE STAGE for a shift toward merit aid among elite institutions was set almost ten years ago, when the Justice Department ruled that collusion among Ivy League schools violated antitrust law. Previously the schools gathered each year, compared notes on applicants who had been accepted to more than one member of the club, and offered each student a similar financial aid package according to a standard formula. It was argued to be a socially responsible cartel—allowing them to distribute aid dollars as widely as possible, instead of engaging in a bidding war for the top candidates. In theory, students would also be encouraged to choose a school based on qualities other than the bottom line.

Since then several pressures have disrupted that equilibrium. Lower-tier private universities began using more merit aid to draw top candidates away from Ivy League and magnet public schools. These merit awards are also put to the more questionable use of "discounting." If Jennifer and Jason are equal candidates in every respect but that Jason's parents have $20,000 a year to spend and Jennifer's don't, a school can offer him a $5,000 "merit" scholarship, still bringing in $15,000 in tuition dollars. In contrast, admitting Jennifer will cost the institution $20,000. The choice is fairly clear cut.

The pressure from these practices has reached the Ivy League and elite liberal arts colleges. Joe Paul Case, dean of financial aid at Amherst College, says that there is an increasing sense of entitlement to merit aid among the middle and upper middle class. "At

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Amherst we try and tell them we have recognized your child's merit by admitting him," he says. But increasingly, that's not good enough.

In this competitive environment, most schools cannot afford the luxury of high principle. Only fifty-seven institutions in the country pay no attention to an applicant's need in their admissions process yet meet 100 percent of an admitted student's demonstrated financial need. Those that do adhere to principle are the most elite institutions, where endowments are heftier, the need to attract students is less acute, and wealthier applicants naturally apply. Small private institutions that stick to lofty ideals may find their financial existence threatened.

One way out of this bind is simply to keep one eye open to need when evaluating applicants. The alternative often seems crueler: many schools admit students regardless of their ability to pay and then don't offer them the aid necessary to attend—a practice known as "admit-deny" in the admissions world. But there are twenty-seven schools, including Brown, Smith, Lafayette, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Bowdoin, Oberlin, Johns Hopkins, and Vassar, that now consider need when evaluating at least some portion of their class. They admit students without regard to need until the money runs out. Then, for the students on the margins, typically between 5 percent and 10 percent of the class, those who can pay get the nod. Bruce Hammond, author of *Discounts and Deals at the Nation's 360 Best Colleges*, thinks the practice is far more widespread than the numbers suggest. Clearly, this is not good news for needy strivers.

Although most of these schools adopted this policy five to ten years ago (if they were ever need-blind), the recent wave of changes in financial aid policy in the Ivy League promises to make this trend more widespread. It would be a mistake to see the motives of these extraordinarily wealthy institutions as purely nefarious. The reforms have been based mostly on a students' financial status rather than merit—Princeton, for example, started the frenzy by replacing loans with grants for all students with family incomes under $40,000 per year. That can only be a good thing for the lower-income student who meets Princeton's academic standards in spite of the odds.

However, the actions of the Ivies have a wide impact. The effect is felt most immediately by schools that compete directly with the Ivies for students but don't have the endowments to grant across-the-board increases in aid. For these schools the choice is stark: give some students better packages than others (based on "merit"), or maintain equity and see the most desirable students "bought" by rival institutions with bigger endowments.

Carleton's Thibitout offers a hypothetical example of potential perverse results of a bidding war: "Say there are five thousand top African-American students in the country. It's a closed set. If this group of students is applying to the same fifty to a hundred universities and we all want to enroll them, and we use more and more merit-based aid (or merit-within-need aid) to attract them, that institution that can use the most merit aid will get those students. If you step back from that process you can ask yourself, is this particular process helping to educate more African Americans? No. Is it providing greater opportunity for African Americans? No. Is it helping any particular institution? No. Is the socioeconomic character of this group representative of the neediest African Americans? No. We have to ask ourselves, whom are we serving?"

The same argument should be made about the top five thousand SAT scorers or football players. But the "competition" for diversity is certainly on the minds of admissions officials at top schools, as they attempt to redefine their elite and often white institutional identities. This is an undeniably positive pressure. But it also forces the question of tradeoffs: Must socioeconomic diversity be sacrificed for ethnic diversity or for attracting the "best" students?

As things stand, poor white kids get hurt by this system, according to Robin Mamlet, dean of admissions at Swarthmore College, "and all kids that schools feel less inclined to seek out—to a lesser extent, the middle class and upper middle class." Is socioeconomic diversity assumed to be a "freebie" that comes along with ethnic diversity? Do insti-

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tutions have any obligation to poor white or Asian students, or to maintain equity in packaging? At the very least, this might be a call to schools with a sense of social responsibility to direct more resources toward outreach programs in elementary and secondary schools, which would broaden the pool of qualified African-American or Latino applicants, making bidding wars ultimately less necessary. James Traub has suggested in the *New York Times Magazine* that this was the unintended result of affirmative action's demise in the University of California system. The California state legislature authorized almost 38.5 million dollars for outreach programs last year and stipulated that public universities spend an additional 31 million dollars on these initiatives. The results are promising. After affirmative action was abolished, minority enrollment at Berkeley declined 47 percent in 1997. This year it was up 30 percent (from 10.7 percent to 13 percent). But affirmative action shouldn't have to end to inspire schools to take steps that will make it less necessary.

THEN AGAIN, if some elite schools abandon need-blind admission or affirmative action, statewide programs choose merit over need, and poor kids, white or black, are edged out of top schools on the margins, they will still get an education—albeit at a less prestigious university. Is that such a tragedy?

In *The Shape of the River*, Derek Bok and William G. Bowen defend affirmative action by showing essentially that prestige does matter. African-American students admitted to prestigious schools with SAT scores well below their school's average still graduate at higher rates and go on to earn more money, get more advanced degrees, and feel more satisfied with their overall college experience than African Americans or white students with equal scores at lower tier schools. A letter of admission from Harvard (or Vassar, or Berkeley) is a ticket to a world in which everyone has long been expected to succeed, and almost everyone does.

The rise of merit scholarships and preferential packaging and the decline of aid based on need are new hidden barriers to poorer students. Of course the most glaring obstacles for these students are not hidden at all: a public school system funded by local property taxes, which prepares students of different socioeconomic backgrounds for different futures. Yet, we have a president who has made educational opportunity and access to college part of the standard stump speech, a matter of national policy on par with any other. The vibrant economy provides both governments and institutions a window of opportunity. But the forces of competition, middle-class self interest, and the wide-ranging myth of unfettered meritocracy all threaten our chances of making good on these promises. ●

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Remembering Joe Wood

Adam Shatz

Joe Wood had a voice as deep as a double-bass, and he spoke as he wrote: low, slowly, softly. He forced you to listen attentively to each of his words, pausing gravely as if to prepare you for the next one. When I first met Joe, I thought this was an affectation. Before long, however, I realized it was a style, the outward mark of a sensibility, artful but true. And with this style, Joe had a look, one that gave him away instantly. The big, bookish glasses. The Malcolm X cap, worn with urbane nonchalance. The knapsack filled to capacity with literature. The bemused, vaguely world-weary expression that sometimes broke into a wide, astonished smile.

I am trying to remember these details because we are not likely to see them—him—again. On July 8, Joe, a thirty-four-year-old writer and editor, visited Mount Rainier in Seattle to go bird-watching for the day. He never came back. During an exhaustive search that eerily coincided with the latest Kennedy family tragedy, forest rangers failed to come up with any physical evidence of Joe's whereabouts. They suspect that he fell from a snowbridge. His body is believed to be buried in the snow or hidden in some ravine.

Joe led his life with exemplary purpose and an uncommon generosity of spirit. The only consolation here is that he died in a place he loved. Joe was a native New Yorker, born and raised in the Bronx, but he seemed happiest, freest, in the woods with his binoculars, peering at birds. Joe also had a mystical streak that was reinforced by a passionate affinity with Japanese culture. He knew that thousands of Japanese go to the mountains each year to die, and though he had no intention of joining them, I'd like to think that he would draw some comfort from this.

Joe and I struck up a friendship just over a year ago, but I felt I already knew him from his sharp, probing work in the *Village Voice*, and from the fine anthology of essays on Malcolm X that he edited. After several long phone conversations over the course of several months, we had coffee in Brooklyn, near both of our homes, and we talked about James Baldwin's essays, which we both loved, and about *The Education of Henry Adams*, which Joe had just completed. The next time we met, Joe was reading William Gaddis's dense philosophical novel *The Recognitions*, and he was puzzling over its treatment of divine illumination—it was "dope," he said, his highest compliment. Before long, Joe and I were seeing a lot of each other. We went to films at MoMA, heard jazz at the Vanguard and ate Japanese food (which Joe ordered with exquisite taste). But mostly we just talked about our interests: Fassbinder and Tarkovsky, Delmore Schwartz and Alfred Kazin, Prince Paul and Miles Davis.

I realize this sounds like a sentimental portrait of intellectual camraderie. And, from time to time, we did, of course, discuss the biz; what kind of writers would we have been had we not? But I think Joe considered friendship a sanctuary from all that. His ambitions were lofty, to be sure, but unlike most writers in New York he was not governed by them. He did not care to live by the informal but still bitter logic of Social Darwinism that leaves otherwise "progressive" writers comparing column inches. I remember vividly a phone conversation we had shortly after we started hanging out. Joe asked me how I was and I proceeded to tell him of all the projects I was taking on. A long pause followed. "But how are you, besides the professional?" I was stunned by the question, and also slightly shamed by it.

Joe was intellectually curious in an old-fashioned way. Which is to say, he went his own way, paying little attention to trends. He wrote slowly, and he did not produce a large body of work. Nor was he quite at home writ-

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ing for magazines. Joe was at heart a man of letters, and his journalism sometimes has a gnomic, lyrical quality that tests—or rather protests against—the boundaries of the form. Still, he leaves behind some remarkable, sensitively drawn essays on the vicissitudes of identity in post–civil rights America. In his essay "Malcolm X and the New Blackness," he asked, "Do Black and White adequately describe my life?" and he replied in the negative.

HIS ANSWER gained in authority from the fact that he understood the yearnings for easy, instinctive solidarity that lie at the heart of nationalist politics, recognized those yearnings in himself. For he had once been, as he put it, "downright romantic" about "my blackness, our Black culture: yams, Zora Neale, Al Green." And so his solution was not to abandon the notion of black identity but to reconceive it—to make it bend to the complex shapes of black America, rather than the reverse. "Our new Blackness," he wrote, evoking Walt Whitman as much as Malcolm X,

> acknowledges the way each of us lives beyond the Black community. I am a multitude of names, masks, community memberships. Denying this is a tyranny—"race" is not my only state. I am a Black and I can be a member of a circle made up of Mississippi Whitefolk: I make new communities all the time. Which does not make me a "multiculturalist" or a "cultural mulatto"—it makes me a human being in the world. Our lives—they are about choosing our communities, and making new ones. Growth. Our lives are about naming ourselves—we are electricians, poor people, Ellingtonians, entymologists, spelunkers, candy-store owners, Woods.

In his casual, unassuming way, Joe embodied this ethos.

Joe grew up in the Bronx, where, he wrote, "no one... seemed to be spending much time thinking about America or Blackness." He never forgot the old neighborhood, and he was tough on those who did, particularly when they were writers he otherwise admired, notably Alfred Kazin. Reviewing Kazin's memoirs in these pages, he argued that Kazin never found his true subject: "the Jewish stranger's road to whiteness and the middle class." In Joe's estimation, Kazin, for all of his graceful sentences, never weighed the costs of making it. The immigrant's son had instead become reconciled to affluence and assimilation, and the price of the ticket was a certain superficiality. Joe found more to admire in the tormented, intractable Delmore Schwartz, with his "lonesome inability to cut himself from the web of anti-Semitism," his "wrestling with the contradictions of modern Jewishness."

Joe shared Schwartz's "lonesome inability" to forget the working-class people he grew up with, and something of his feverish lyricism. As a writer for the *Voice* and an editor at the New Press, he moved easily through a predominantly white publishing world, but he never ceased to point out inequities his white peers preferred not to notice, beginning with the fact that he was often the only black man in the room. Joe wasn't grateful to be in that room, either; he knew he deserved to be there. And in his quiet but forceful way, he reminded them that his presence alone did not fulfill the promise of integration.

The last time I saw Joe, a week before he disappeared, we ate sushi outdoors on Ninth Street. Later that evening, we had drinks at a Moroccan bar on the Lower East Side. A belly dancer roped Joe into dancing with her, and he held his own, laughing all the way. He told me he was looking forward to wrapping up his long-awaited book on Mississippi at a writer's colony during the fall. Where Joe might have gone with his writing, we'll never know. Joe's essays—and virtually everything Joe wrote was an essay in the classic sense of an effort, where the writer makes mistakes as well as discoveries on the hard road to insight—were unpredictable, and I think Joe was sometimes nearly as surprised by them as we, his readers, were. His loss deprives us of a brilliant, heterodox young writer, and a cherished friend. ●

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Brian Morton

I MET JOE WOOD in 1992, after mutual friends suggested that I might ask him to write for *Dissent*. I remember liking him immediately. He was an interesting mix: he was blunt, almost fierce, in his opinions, yet in his manner he struck me as one of the gentlest people I'd ever met.

We got into the habit of having dinner two or three times a year. It was always fun to talk with him; you could count on him to put the ball in play, conversationally. He almost always had some theme, some question he was working out in his mind—the many meanings of the idea of family; the many ways in which the idea of race can give us a distorted picture of ourselves. You had the impression that if you called him at any hour of the day, you would find him thinking about some subtle theoretical problem.

Ten years younger than I, Joe had read more than I had, but, as I was grateful to discover, he wasn't the kind of person who bludgeons you with his learning. He was generous with what he knew; when you left him at the end of the evening you wanted to go home and read the writers he'd been telling you about. He would have made a good teacher.

He liked to challenge you. Black writers, he once said, were always exploring their personal experience of race; why weren't white writers doing the same? Why was Norman Podhoretz's "My Negro Problem—and Ours," published in 1963, the last serious personal essay about race by a white writer? Why didn't *Dissent* run a series in which people like Richard Rorty explored what race has meant to them?

As I was getting to know him through our conversations, I was also getting to know him through his work: his introduction to the collection of essays on Malcolm X that he edited, his ambivalent profile of Albert Murray in the *Village Voice*, his long essay in Paul Berman's collection *Blacks and Jews*. Yeats says somewhere that out of our arguments with others, we make rhetoric, out of our arguments with ourselves, we make poetry. One of the beautiful things about Joe's essays was that they were simultaneously arguments with others and arguments with himself. His work was marked by strong political passion, but also, and always, by an open-hearted exploration of his own contradictions. I think identity was Joe's main theme: the complexity of personal and cultural identity, the slipperiness of it, and the damage that comes when groups and individuals define themselves too crudely.

One of the things I liked about talking with him was that I could never anticipate his reactions. Once, thinking about a piece of fiction I was working on, I told Joe that I thought the gulf of ethnicity might be harder for a fiction writer to cross than the gulf of gender. I said I thought I could create a convincing white woman character, but I wasn't so sure I could create a convincing black male character. Joe smiled and said, "I'm not sure I could either." It struck me as a generous remark.

At one point Joe told me that he'd met Alfred Kazin, and he spoke appreciatively about a lecture he'd heard Kazin give. A few months later, when I heard that Kazin was publishing a book culled from his diaries, I asked Joe to review it for *Dissent*. I wanted to see what the lyrical young memoirist would have to say about the lyrical old memoirist.

The review was a long time coming—he read a great deal of Kazin's work to prepare for it. When it finally came in, I didn't like it. He argued that "the principal narrative" running through Kazin's autobiographical work (not only his published diaries, but his memoirs as well, from *A Walker in the City* to *New York Jew*) was Kazin's unhappiness over "the loss of *his* America to black 'foreigners.'" This wasn't a picture of Kazin that I could recognize.

I wrote Joe a long letter, telling him what I thought was wrong with the review. The letter was harsh—without quite admitting it to myself, I made it as harsh as I could, because I wouldn't have minded if he'd decided to take the review and publish it somewhere else. Kazin's work meant a lot to me, and I wasn't happy about the prospect of publishing an attack on him.

Joe wrote back a few weeks later. It wasn't a mannerly disagreement, particularly on my

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end. At one point in his review, Joe had criticized Kazin for not expressing outrage after telling a story about racist violence in the South. In my letter, I wrote, "Isn't it possible that a writer who has recorded the sight of a white man throwing a lit cigarette at a black soldier and another man playfully tossing around the finger of a black man whom he's just lynched—isn't it possible that a writer who's recorded these things might feel that an expression of authorial outrage was superfluous? It seems to me that you're holding part of your own literary intelligence at bay. Your own work is filled with irony, ambiguity, understatement—it's filled with a battery of rhetorical devices sophisticated enough to warm the heart of Lionel Trilling himself—but you don't seem to grant Kazin the use of the same resources. In a piece in the *Village Voice* a few years ago, as I recall, you dismissed Farrakhan's anti-Semitism as 'boring.' Someone reading your work in the spirit in which you read Kazin's would conclude—what?" (In the *Voice* article, of course, Joe had made clear his disdain for Farrakhan and his worldview. I was trying to make the point that anyone's words could be damagingly ripped from their context.)

When he wrote back to me, he didn't exactly seem flattered by my ability to quote from his work. "I for one promise not to suggest slyly that you don't deal well with writers of color if you promise never again to pull a comment such as 'anti-Semitism is such a boring substitute. . .' from one of my pieces and leave it hanging naked in the air, twisting with possible meaning."

In his letter, Joe said he thought my intelligence had been "clouded a bit by your distaste for my argument . . . I am reworking the piece to answer your more technical complaints . . . Also, I will improve the beginning of the piece by letting readers know that I think Kazin is worth reading. But I'm not going to drop the basic thesis. . . Obviously my interpretation is shaped by my experience in the world. But does my blackness ruin my reading? I hope not—if I pulled out my black eyes I'd be blind. As it is, I'm pretty sure I'm as capable as you of discerning the differences between the use of irony, understatement, and other literary tricks—and the fact of racism . . .

"I'm not one to give up," he continued. "Please keep your mind open. . . .When should I get this piece in? I'm eager to have a fight in public."

I wasn't sure that our friendship, which was not so very strong in the first place,had survived the exchange. The next time we talked, I expected him to be curt with me. He wasn't. "I enjoyed the argument," he said.

A hard and patient worker, Joe wrote two or three more drafts. The review he finally produced was a long, thoughtful, dazzlingly intricate meditation on Kazin, modernism, Jewishness, blackness, whiteness, ethnic success in America, literary tradition, and the art of the memoir. In this version, the admiration Joe felt for much of Kazin's writing was more explicit—this version even conveyed a certain feeling of kinship. His "basic thesis," however, was unchanged—we'd kept arguing, and he hadn't retreated an inch, I'm glad to say.

Instead of destroying our friendship, the argument made it stronger. (This, it should be clear, was mostly Joe's doing; he was more comfortable with serious disagreements than I was.) I think we both felt easier with each other now. Joe became more interested in writing for *Dissent*; he planned to write reconsiderations of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison for us. I was eager to keep working with him.

There are some people who, even in their uniqueness, seem to represent something beyond themselves. We had dinner last spring—a typical dinner, in which he displayed such a wide range of interests, such sheer pure love of learning, that as I listened to him I found myself smiling with admiration for the way his mind worked. After we said good-bye I watched him for a second as he headed for the subway. This guy, I thought, with his black leather jacket and his satchel full of books—this is one of the people who keep civilization alive.

The next time we talked on the phone, I thought of telling him this. But I didn't. If I had, I'm sure he would have laughed. ●

BRIAN MORTON is executive editor of *Dissent* and author of *Starting Out in the Evening*.

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It's a Tab, Tab, Tab, Tab World

Michael Tomasky

NEW YORK is a place of surfeits and shortages. Of office space, we have too much; of plain old space, too little. Of fileted fresh lobster meat, at $35 a pound, there is much too much; of basic foodstuffs for the legion of hungry, far too little. Of opinions about the schools crisis, too many; of classroom seats, too few. And of heat, as E.B. White once ruefully observed, there is always either too much or too little.

But there is one commodity, it seems to me, of which New York possesses exactly the right amount: newspapers. True, the number's gone down over the years. You still read the occasional paean to the days when there were nine or eleven or whatever it was, but the truth is, the thought of nine general-interest newspapers is overwhelming, even absurd, in an age when anyone is a couple of clicks away from reading *El Pais* or *Suddeustche Zeitung*. Besides, much of that industry has shifted now to a muscular immigrant press—Polish and Russian and Indian and Arabic and perhaps nine papers in Chinatown alone. No, three seems about the right number—still more than any other American city, which of course is, to chauvinistic New Yorkers, the main thing (and you can stretch it to four if you throw in the *Wall Street Journal*), and still offering a sufficient diet of variety and spice.

For many in the upper classes, there is only the *New York Times*, the great and glorious *Times*. As much as people complain about it (and everyone does: it's too "politically correct," it's too square, the film critic is too soft, the theater critic too tough), and for all the premillennial updating and tinkering with format that has changed it so dramatically in the last decade, and all those new sections that tumble out when you open the paper, like shingles off an old roof, it remains probably the world's best newspaper.

But there's a lot the *Times* doesn't tell you. I don't mean in the old, left-wing, cold-war sense, like blaming the Salvadoran rebels for blowing up a bridge when the right-wing forces really did it, although I suppose that sort of thing probably still happens now and again. No—I mean that there are other ways to present the collection of crises and clashes and folderols that make up "the news," ways that are sometimes more genuine, that get to the heart of the matter more efficiently. Of course, those ways are also sometimes false and shallow. Sinister, even. But even when sinister, they usually manage to be entertaining. Which is, at bottom, why most people read them; it's certainly why tabloidism has come to dominate the way news is manufactured in this country. And it's why, paradoxically, the future of tabloid newspapers is rather bleak.

WHEN I FIRST moved to New York, in 1985, I regarded the tabloids as a curiosity, a circus act. I chuckled, but mildly disapproved, when I saw Eduard Shevardnadze referred to as "Shevy." He was, in addition, a "Red Big," as in, "Red Big to Kampelman: Nyet on Arms Pact." I found it vaguely entertaining, but I assumed, as I'm sure many non-New Yorkers do, that there couldn't possibly be anything of real value behind headlines like that.

Fourteen years later, I guess I'm no longer a non-New Yorker, because I read the *New York Post* and the *Daily News* every day—more thoroughly, I'll confess, than I read the *Times*. If this surprises you, I can say only that, years ago, it would have surprised me too. I remember, when I got my first reporting job in New York, being startled to see not merely how thoroughly my more seasoned colleagues read

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these strange New York tabloids every day, but how much weight they gave to the local news in them; how much more weight they gave the tabs, in fact, than the *Times*, and how it seemed odd to them to think otherwise. That, remember, was the mid-1980s, when the *Times* was more likely to base a correspondent in Khartoum than in the Bronx. The *Times* has vastly improved its city coverage since then, but it did so in no small part because *Times* executives understood that it was the tabloids that were really driving the local news cycle.

They still do. If you read the tabloids on any given morning, and then listen to one of the all-news radio stations during the afternoon and watch the eleven o'clock news at night, you'll see just how many stories that originate in one tabloid or the other get "picked up," as they say, in other media. An asbestos scare in a Queens school district, a funeral of a hero firefighter, a high-stakes poker game in Albany involving legislators and lobbyists—these are tabloid dramas, delivered with the combination of splash, dash, pathos, and (quite often) bathos for which tabloid journalism is renowned. These are not stories with Big Implications. But they are human and meaningful and important to the life of the city; the tabloids are wonderful at deciding immediately how their readers should feel about them, turning them into an allegorical judgment about some aspect of city life—the heroism of an immigrant in the face of struggle, the inscrutable honor of a mobster that his Ivy League prosecutors could never comprehend, the louche profligacy of the upper classes and especially of their children (there is often a strong proletarian tilt to these stories). To avoid them, to feel you don't need to know them, is in some sense to fail a basic test of citizenship. If you are, or want to be, a New Yorker, in tune with the texture of life here, you should know who Elisa Izquierdo is (victim of horrific child abuse from a few years back), the tabloid nickname bestowed upon big-money, oft-facelifted divorcée Jocelyn Wildenstein ("The Bride of Wildenstein"), the layout of the penthouse aerie of a corrupt union boss named Gus Bevona (screening room, kitchen, steam shower), where Police Commissioner Howard Safir was when he told the City Council he couldn't attend a hearing on poice misconduct in the wake of the Amadou Diallo shooting (the Oscars). Because you just should, that's why.

THE *TIMES* covers many of these things in its style. But the tabloids have a way of developing them into a narrative, and an eye for the defining detail, that can muscle more sober analysis out of the picture. Three quick examples:

• In 1992, then-Congressman Steve Solarz of Brooklyn was implicated in the House banking scandal. Details dribbled out here and there about various other-than-scrupulous activities Solarz was involved in. They were interesting, though not entirely memorable. Until, that is, *New York Newsday*, the now-defunct city edition of the Long Island tabloid, reported that the congressman's wife, Nina, had stiffed a shoe retailer on Brooklyn's Kings Highway for $1,200 in unpaid bills. The store's clerks were quoted testifying to her regally supercilious manner (note: she subsequently pleaded guilty to two counts of skimming money from the coffers of an outfit she ran that "helped" women in Turkey), and the inevitable comparisons to Imelda Marcos were drawn. Whatever defenses of the Solarzes were still being mounted—the most important of which had appeared, interestingly enough, in the *Times*, which ran a sympathetic front-page piece on the embattled solon, complete with a photo of him with his dog)—vaporized immediately. Solarz lost the next election, and his political career ended.

• In 1997, then-House Speaker Newt Gingrich met with Lars-Erik Nelson of the *Daily News* (another good reason to read a tabloid: Nelson is the best newspaper columnist in America, and no one else is even close) and representatives of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. At one point in the interview, Gingrich allowed as how he'd launched an offensive against Bill Clinton because, on a return flight from Israel aboard Air Force One, Gingrich was relegated to a seat in the rear of the plane. The broadsheet reporters clucked in silence; Nelson immediately ran and called the desk, and the next day's *News* had a cover

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illustration of Gingrich in diapers with the headline "CRY BABY!" Congressman (now Senator) Charles Schumer had it blown up to poster size and hauled it down into the well of the House. It made news everywhere in America, somehow came to represent everything people didn't like about Gingrich but couldn't quite articulate, and helped set a tone of negative press coverage from which he never recovered.

• In 1990, the *Daily News* was out on strike against its owner at the time, the Tribune Company of Chicago. *News* management had hired, to state its case at press conferences, a woman named Lisa Robinson. She was awful—arrogant, icy, robotic, the worst caricature of a corporate spokesperson you could imagine. When you saw her on television, you wondered what on earth could have possessed the Tribune Company to hire her, and where the hell she came from, other than Three Mile Island—where it emerged she'd been a management mouthpiece after the. . .incident. Amy Pagnozzi, a great tabloid columnist writing for the *Post* at the time, interviewed her and wrote it up. It was Pagnozzi's great fortune to have been sitting with Robinson at three o'clock in the afternoon, because it was at that hour each day, as Pagnozzi mercilessly reported, that Robinson purchased a bag of M & M's, lined them up on her desk by color, and ate them one by one. The day this column appeared was the last one Robinson spent flacking for the Tribune Company.

This is what the tabloids do brilliantly. It's not an easy thing to do, capturing on a couple of hours' notice that first universal reflex and then packaging it in such a way that it both confirms and augments the reader's prejudice. The tabloid newspapers invented this, and still, no one does it better. Their coverage of John Kennedy Jr.'s death was of course excessive and saccharine, with sixteen-page wraparound sections and endless interviews with the same few people and the "Goodnight, Sweet Prince" stuff. But, to me anyway, the coverage—the subtext of which was, "This is maybe the biggest Kennedy tragedy of them all, because this Kennedy transcended politics and still could have been president"—had a kind of poetic realness about it. There was something different about this Kennedy, and his death had meaning, or meanings—political, social, cultural. The tabs explored those meanings, or at least the first, coarse drafts of them, and they did it fast, and moved on to the next thing.

So that's what tabloids do well. Here's what they do badly: they capture on a couple of hours' notice that first universal reflex and then package it in such a way that it both confirms. . . In other words, that first reflex is often the right one; but what happens when it's wrong or irresponsible? Or, in the increasingly inflammatory case of the *Post*, when it's both of those things and profoundly reactionary to boot?

I've been talking about the "tabs," generically, but I think I should stop for a moment and note their differences. The *Daily News*, "New York's Hometown Paper" as it calls itself, was started in 1919 by Joseph Medill Patterson and Robert McCormick, whose forbears had started the Chicago *Tribune*. It is by tradition the newspaper of outer-borough Catholicism, which meant the Irish and the Italians in the old days—"Tell It to Sweeney," ran the *News*'s traditional dictum to its reporters, and by and large they did. And though ownership has changed hands—it's now controlled by Mort Zuckerman, the developer who also holds the *Atlantic Monthly* and *U.S. News & World Report*—its mission has always been more or less the same, even if today Rodriguez and Chang are very much born in mind alongside Sweeney: Give the people the news they need, the sports, and a little gossip, without much of an ideological slant and with lots of pictures.

Though its circulation is around eight hundred thousand, down by a third from its (and New York's) glory days but still pretty hefty, these haven't been great times for the *News*. While the *Post* has pretty much defined tabloidism in recent years, the *News* has been in the throes of a massive identity crisis. One day, it tries to be too *Post*-like, too flippant and irreverent; the next, it wants to be taken really, really seriously. It can't quite figure out what it wants to do, and consequently, it fails

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to remember what it's always done best: be the city's working-class conscience, get out there and launch crusades. It still does that from time to time—excellent recent series on asthma among poor children and the extortionate rates the Board of Education pays to lease space from private landlords to deal with the overcrowding crisis come to mind—and last year, the *News*'s editorial page did win a Pulitzer, for a series of strong editorials about malfeasance at Harlem's Apollo Theater.

But the paper is somehow missing its soul these days. And things just keep going wrong. Four years ago, it moved out of its splendid deco palace on East 42nd Street, the one with the lobby with the huge rotating globe, used in the *Superman* films because it was such a perfect epitome of what a big-city newspaper building should look like, and over to some no-man's-land West 30s address. It bought color presses, which cost hundreds of millions of dollars; they worked for about a week before the paper went back to its old black-and-white. It built a new printing plant somewhere in New Jersey, which did not aid in the timely delivery of the paper because somebody forgot that, to get from New Jersey to New York, you have to go through tunnels or across bridges, which tend to attract traffic. A few months ago, a judge gave one of the *News*'s craft unions a huge settlement, and now the paper is cutting some of the cheapest corners imaginable: reporters now must have an editor's approval before they can take a source to lunch.

Part of the *News*'s problem—indeed the root of it—is that New York is a city that doesn't really want a working-class conscience anymore. It's no longer the union town it was, and the new immigrants, which the *News* has tried admirably to court, don't seem all that interested. Take a cab; your driver will more likely be reading a paper in Arabic or Hindu than the *News*; they become Americans through television and Michael Jordan, but they hold onto their cultures through their newspapers. And white liberal New York, which once supported the city's working classes and worked in political concert with them, now is more interested in the market, scoring good Knicks tickets, finding the freshest cut of mahi mahi. This New York is still liberal in the way it votes, most of the time, but beyond voting it doesn't really want to be bothered anymore. This class distrusts sincerity; it wants irony; it wants gossip; it wants laughs.

Enter, ladies and gentlemen, the *New York Post*.

By most standard measures, the *Post* is a joke. Its circulation is around 430,000, making it a distant third to the *Times* and the *News*. Its advertising base is a horror show—whereas the *News* at least gets lots of display pages out of Macy's and the outer-borough appliance chains, and so on, the *Post* gets considerably less of that action; there's an old story that a department store magnate once told Rupert Murdoch that "your readers are my shoplifters." Who knows whether that's true, but on any given day, the bulk of the *Post*'s display ads hawk cell phones and beepers, and maybe mattresses. Its classified section, a time-honored cash cow for most newspapers, runs to about three pages on a good day.

The standards of journalism are only a shade better. I must point out that the paper has a number of good and knowledgeable and responsible reporters; I know them. They could work anywhere (the *Times* has hired more than few *Post*-ies over the years). But they're fighting a fire with a garden hose. Often, the *Post* is full of garbage, inaccurate, irresponsible, shameless in the way it lionizes its friends and crushes its enemies and slants its stories to serve its view of the world. About a year ago, former mayor David Dinkins, at a press conference, infelicitously but inoffensively used the phrase "Park Avenue Jews" when discussing the 1991 Crown Heights riots. The *Times* and the *News* both noted the remark deep in their stories. But in the *Post*, where black-Jewish tension—caused, needless to say, by restive and intransigent blacks—has been a useful *leitmotif* for thirty years, the words were on Page One ("the wood," in tabspeak) in huge type. It was absurd, but it elicited no particular outrage. "Well, that's the *Post*," people muttered, rolling their eyes, in the way one might speak of a lawless cousin on whom the family has long since given up.

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This is how the *Post* works. The people there know every tabloid trick, because as far as America is concerned, they invented them. I once paid a visit to the paper's morgue to study the transformation the paper underwent when ownership passed, in late 1976, from Dorothy Schiff, the New Deal-promoting liberal crusader who'd held the paper since 1939, to Murdoch, then an unknown and vaguely unsettling eminence who shocked New York in 1976 by buying up *New York* magazine, the *Village Voice*, and the *Post*. (In those quaint times, this was considered a dangerous concentration of ownership!) Murdoch's first *Post* hit the stands on December 30, 1976, during a week when, according to agreed-upon news-business tradition, nothing happens. Perhaps it was out of respect for that tradition, more British (and hence Australian) than American, that Murdoch didn't tamper with the paper much.

For a week.

ON JANUARY 3, the thick red stripe that still underlines the paper's name across the front page appeared, as did an even greater augury. Until Murdoch, the only gossip, per se, that appeared in the *Post* was the "It Happened Last Night" column by Earl Wilson, which chronicled the comings and goings of Broadway's stars and advised readers on which cabaret shows they should run, not walk, to see. But this "Page Six" was something altogether new, more bare-knuckled and raw. To the initiated, the fingerprints of publicists and other sources using the column to settle scores were evident enough, as they are today; to the lay reader, it was inside dish as it had never been served. The column's first edition carried items about Henry Kissinger and William Paley, Jackie O. and John Kennedy Jr. (two *separate* squibs), Margaux Hemingway and husband Errol Wetson engaged in two "rather loud slanging matches" (note the Aussie vernacular), and Paul Lynde tossing french fries at a heckler at an East 53rd Street "male bar called 'Cowboy.' " That a former secretary of state should share space with a man best known for being called on by certain game show contestants "to block" was a turn of events with little precedent in American journalism. There was much more change to come.

Over time, known liberals among the staff were given the message that the *Post* was perhaps no longer the place for them. Big columnists, like James Wechsler and Murray Kempton, were untouchable, but life was made difficult even for their like. The editor Murdoch brought in declared that he just couldn't parse the filigreed sentences of Kempton, a man of awesome erudition and style, and made Kempton submit his prose to the blue pen of the man who now edits the *Star*, Murdoch's supermarket property.

And so on. The paper has changed since then, but the essential tone was set in those first months, anticipating and probably starting nearly every disquieting trend in American journalism. And though it loses pots of money, it doesn't matter, because Murdoch is sitting on billions elsewhere, and what's a few million a year when the paper provides a voice, a screaming voice, for his politics in the country's biggest market, and makes him a player in electing and defeating politicians he likes or loathes? It helped elect Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani and George Pataki and Al D'Amato, although it may be losing its juice a little. Last year, in spite of two front-page pro-D'Amato editorials in the last week of the campaign, Chuck Schumer swamped Alfonse. The test will come in next year's U.S. Senate campaign. In recent months, the paper has been out of its mind over the thought of Hillary Clinton becoming a senator from New York. The day after she had her New York debut, up at Pat Moynihan's farm, the *Post* ran seven stories or gossip items slagging her in one way or another. When she said that Jerusalem should be the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel, the wood read "Hillary's Chutzpah"; not entirely untrue, but imagine how it would have read if she'd said anything but that! Most people are still rolling their eyes and saying, "Well, that's the *Post*"; but more than a few are beginning to note that, even for the *Post*, this is a bit much.

And yet. . .one reads it. Its politics aside, it is entertaining, funny, sometimes brilliant. Norman Mailer, speaking at a "Save the *Post*" rally a few years ago during one of the paper's

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many recent near-death experiences, said he read several newspapers a day but he read the *Post* first because "it's alive. You can argue with it and bite it." You can; and it bites back. The *Post* has cleverly made itself into the second newspaper of the intelligentsia. Its coverage of media, in particular, of Tina Brown's parties and the goings-on at Condé Nast, has reached insane proportions. No regular person could possibly be interested in it all, but it's not in there for regular people; it's in there for the smart set, and if there's one thing the smart set adores more than itself, it's reading about itself. The *News* has tried to copy the *Post*'s example along these lines, but its passion just isn't located there. One wants to cheer for the *News*, but if you get on a subway, and a discarded *Post* and a discarded *News* are strewn about, which one do you pick up? It pains me to say it, but it's not even close.

ANOTHER THING occurred to me as I was reading through the old *Post*s from Schiff's era: how remarkably tame they were by comparison to today's editions. They were sensationalist, of course, but back then, sensational news was generally limited to two or three topics: a mob rub-out, a murder in one of the tonier ZIP codes, the occasional rising of a stench from Tammany. Beyond that, the *Post* was a serious newspaper—more news stories, a larger news hole, as they say, more "straight" reporting. Today, there's virtually no category of news event that cannot be sensationalized. And, today, it isn't just tabloid newspapers that do it; there are fifteen other media—the cable channels, the screamfests, the Web sites—anxious to follow them, or more often to lead them, into the hurricane.

In other words, it's a tabloid world now, to such an extent that the tabs' very success may have laid the groundwork for their downfall. Tabs sprang to life at a time, after all, when major cities had ten or fifteen or more newspapers and when street-corner news hawkers were killed, execution style, in the competition for the most lucrative corner. They had to, or felt they had to, scream their news, and they were the only ones that did it. Today, almost everyone screams the news. And if people can get the same sort of news that was once the sole province of the tabs most everywhere else, and can get it in a modem-zapped instant, why do they need tabloid newspapers, when newspapers are dying in every city in America? (The survivors, the great broadsheets excepted, will start looking more and more like the Web. I was in Syracuse recently; the above-the-fold part of the front-page of the *Herald-American* looks exactly like a Web site home page.)

Most people who watch this stuff are betting that either the *News* or the *Post* won't exist in, oh, five years. Maybe sooner than that. Once the first one dies, the second will probably experience a brief reinvigoration—it will, after all, be able to gloat over the other's obituary and hire the best people from the one that folded. But the world of tabloid newspapers will have suffered a death blow, even as tabloid culture thrives. ●

MICHAEL TOMASKY is the political columnist for *New York* magazine.

Did you remember to order a gift subscription? See p. 72.

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Entrapments of Modernity

George Scialabba

DON'T THINK, SMILE:
NOTES ON A DECADE OF DENIAL
by Ellen Willis
Beacon Press 192 pp $24

FOR THIRTY YEARS, in a wide arc from the *Village Voice* and *Social Text* to the *New Yorker* and *Mirabella*, Ellen Willis has been the sixties' best exponent and a savvy interpreter of American politics and culture. Her output thus far is small—two sterling collections, *Beginning to See the Light* (1981) and *No More Nice Girls* (1992)—so one eagerly welcomes her new book (notwithstanding the false note struck by its title, which insinuates cluelessness on the other side —always a polemical dud move).

What do the sixties have to say to the nineties? In essays on crime, race, censorship, globalization, Bosnia, the Republican ascendancy, the culture of austerity, Zippergate, and right-wing libertarianism, Willis advocates left-wing libertarianism. The left should contend for the maximum of individual development and expression; and what it has to contend against are external constraints imposed by gross economic inequality and internal ones arising from the inculcation early in life of a rigid, self-denying morality. Among the tenets of left libertarianism:

> that the point of life is to live and enjoy it fully; that genuine virtue is the overflow of happiness, not the bitter fruit of self-denial; that sexual freedom and pleasure are basic human rights; that endless work and subordination to bosses are offenses to the human spirit; that contempt for the black poor is the middle class's effort to deny that we are next; that Mom is not going back home again and so we need to rethink domestic life, child rearing, and the structures of work; that democracy is not about voting for nearly indistinguishable politicians but about having a voice in collective decision-making, not only in government but at home, school, and work.

Naturally this vision should be accompanied by tough-minded analysis, in the first instance "a thoroughgoing critique of the new economic order and its accelerating class war."

Attention to the internal as well as the external yields much astute commentary. Willis's discussion of crime, "Beyond Good and Evil," takes note of its obvious roots in material deprivation but also links the "psychopolitics of crime" to the "dynamics of domination" subtly and rigorously. "The Ordeal of Liberal Optimism" addresses the liberal critique of affirmative action, suggesting persuasively that it takes too little account of racial psychodynamics. Both essays are notable for lucidity, fairmindedness, and sureness in getting at the marrow of bitterly contested questions.

An essay on censorship and free speech starts out, like most feminist approaches to the antipornography debate, considering the "politics of sexual representation." But Willis moves quickly to "the politics of speech as such," where "the case against the censors is not so obvious after all." There turns out to be more substance to the critique of First Amendment absolutism than one might have supposed. Catherine MacKinnon and others argue with some plausibility that the boundaries of speech protected by the First Amendment can only be specified by taking no less seriously the constitutional mandate of equality set out in the Fourteenth Amendment. Speech undeniably has consequences, sometimes entirely predictable ones. "Distinguishing talk about inferiority from verbal imposition of inferior-

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ity may be complicated at the edges," MacKinnon writes, "but it is clear enough at the center with sexual and racial harassment, pornography, and hate propaganda."

Willis avoids the untenable absolutist rejoinders: that the First Amendment is unambiguous and that speech can infallibly be distinguished from action. She acknowledges, as one must, that speech is a particular kind of action; and of course she does not deny that legally actionable harassment can sometimes be purely verbal. But while MacKinnon's argument stops there, content merely to demote speech from categorical uniqueness, Willis goes on to root a defense of controversial speech in a theory of freedom, which is in turn derived from a theory of moral psychology. It's not that speech is never wounding, she argues, but that freedom is healing.

> Symbolic expression, however forceful, leaves a space between communicator and recipient, a space for contesting, fighting back with one's own words and images, organizing to oppose whatever action the abhorred speech may incite. Though speech may, and often does, support the structure of domination, whether by lending aid and comfort to the powerful or frightening and discouraging their targets, in leaving room for opposition it falls short of enforcing submission. For this reason the unrestrained clash of ideas, emotions, visions provides a relatively safe model—one workable even in a society marked by serious imbalances of power—of how to handle social conflict, with its attendant fear, anger, and urges to repress, through argument, persuasion, and negotiation (or at worst grim forbearance) rather than coercion. In the annals of human history, even this modest exercise in freedom is a revolutionary development; for the radical democrat it prefigures the extension of freedom to other areas of social life.

I think this takes the debate a step beyond Stanley Fish's *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*—no small achievement.

THROUGHOUT these essays it's a pleasure to watch the deployment of Willis's extraordinary dialectical skills. But not all her targets are equally deserving. A good deal of the book is devoted to rebuking the "economic" or "populist" or "majoritarian" left for insufficient attention to the psychocultural roots of inequality and domination. To those who suggest that perhaps a thoroughgoing demystification of truth, beauty, objectivity, morality, authority, law, and love can wait until the minimum wage goes up a dollar or two and not quite so many American households (currently one in three) are only a major illness away from bankruptcy, Willis replies that freedom and equality are indivisible. If Americans "do not feel entitled to demand freedom and equality in their personal and social relations," she insists, "they will not fight for freedom and equality in their economic relations." Furthermore, "people are not 'distracted' by the moral and cultural issues that affect their daily existence as much as the size of their paychecks; they care passionately about those issues."

Isn't there a non sequitur here? A popular majority might, after all, agree broadly with the left about freedom and equality in economic relations but disagree broadly about freedom and equality in personal relations. People no doubt care passionately about both economic issues and moral/cultural ones, but their views about the former may be much closer to those of economic leftists than their views about the latter are to those of cultural leftists. Actually, these are not merely logical possibilities. According to Alan Wolfe in *One Nation After All*, they're the way things are. Needless to say, Wolfe's book is not the last word, but he offers plenty of evidence.

And if this is the way things are, what follows? Would economic populists then be entitled, and inclined, to show cultural libertarians the door? I'm not nearly so sure as Willis. Which door, anyway? A little comradely recrimination may be good for the ideological blood pressure; but beyond that, I don't see what's at stake in this strategic debate. There is no left-wing party or other organization awaiting its outcome, ready to carry the approved word far and wide. It won't and shouldn't lead anyone to drop one kind of political activity and take up another. Economic radicals and cultural radicals can pretty much count on each other's handful of votes, and neither has any resources or patrons to be

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raided by the other. The masses rarely peruse the *Nation* (even less frequently, alas, *Dissent*); they're busy or tired or glued to the screen, and we're not on the local newsstand anyway. So by all means let's fire away at one another, but with popguns rather than heavy artillery.

In any case, economic democracy is surely the best thing that could happen to cultural radicalism. During his quixotic 1968 mayoral campaign, Norman Mailer won over an emphatically skeptical Bella Abzug by roaring back at her: "I can tell you that regardless of my views on women as you think you know them, women in any administration I could run would have more voice, more respect, more real opportunity for argument than any of the other candidates would offer you." Just so. A little (or better, a whopping) redistribution of wealth would put cultural radicals—most of whom, I suspect, inhabit the lower four-fifths of the income scale—in a much stronger position to ignore the rest of society, press their claims on it, or construct alternatives to it.

Willis's quarrel with the "culturally conservative" or "pro-family" left is more substantial. In recent years public discussion of abortion, divorce, welfare, and crime has been marked by near-universal deference for words like "virtue," "responsibility," "self-control," "discipline," "stability," "community," "family," and the like. Willis is deeply suspicious of this rhetorical tendency. It serves, she argues, to shore up a familiar system of domination and hierarchy based on self-denial and the subordination of women. The premise of traditional morality is some version of original sin; it "assumes the need to combat the human inclination toward evil by imposing coercive social controls as well as the internal controls of conscience and guilt." The agency of this repression is the family: "it is the parents' job to suppress their children's evil impulses and assure that they develop the requisite inner controls." These "evil impulses" are erotic: desires for bodily satisfaction and pleasure, which are imagined as potentially limitless and progressively consuming in later life if not firmly curbed in infancy and then, in childhood, channeled into forms of expression (that is., maleness and femaleness) that allow for social order and continuity. The cost of these "inner controls" is a pervasive, largely unconscious unease: fear and submissiveness alternating with rage and resentment. "In demonizing children's desire, the family provokes the very destructive impulses it must then imperfectly repress."

The child's thwarted impulses persist in adulthood, this argument continues, where they are countered by an array of external controls—religious, legal, medical, economic, etc.—that teach and enforce one or another version of hierarchy. They are also countered by the need to repress the acutely painful memories of rage and humiliation that an open acknowledgment of long-unsatisfied desires would provoke. In addition, social, sexual, familial, economic, and other hierarchies are less oppressive for some (males, whites, parents, employers) than for others—an incentive for the more fortunate to make the best of a bad but apparently natural and inevitable situation.

Hence, according to Willis, our society's precarious equilibrium. "A moral system based on repression and coercion, on the stifling of desire, generates enormous stores of anger and frustration that can never be totally controlled. When those emotions find expression in destructive behavior, it is seized on as proof of intractable human evil and the need to maintain or increase repression. The result is a closed circle, a self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing system of tragic dimensions."

The way out of this circle is the conquest of scarcity. As long as societal survival was not assured, hierarchical subordination and the disciplining of individual desire were self-evidently necessary. Over the last two centuries, however, it has become possible to see traditional morality as a strategy of social self-preservation, a strategy bound to be superseded and indeed already in retreat. When pleasure—or at least its material prerequisites—is more abundant, self-denial can cease to be the foundation of all collective life, and morality as a structure of internalized coercion, along with the patriarchal family that reproduces it, will wither away.

And what might come after? The only place Willis hints at an answer is a passage in

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her well-known 1979 essay "The Family: Love It or Leave It":

> The logical postpatriarchal unit is some version of the commune. Groups of people who agreed to take responsibility for each other, pool their economic resources, and share housework and child care would have a basis for stability independent of any one couple's sexual bond; children would have the added security of close ties to adults other than their biological parents (and if the commune were large and flexible enough, parents who had stopped being lovers might choose to remain in it); communal child rearing, shared by both sexes, would remove the element of martyrdom from parenthood.

A little sketchy, this. But even those who are dubious about Willis's postpatriarchal alternative must acknowledge that her libertarian-socialist utopianism is based on something more than a sentimental attachment to sixties slogans. It is, on the contrary, a highly plausible deduction from the prevailing conception of modernity, which defines the good life in terms of leisure and abundance and envisions history as continuous moral and material progress, made possible by the spread of scientific and social rationality. Nearly all secular thinkers of both left and right subscribe to this conception, and in their case Willis's exasperated exhortations to "think radically" are very much to the point.

At least one secular leftist, however, thought quite as radically about modernity as Willis and came to different conclusions. Christopher Lasch was not a believer in original sin but in what might be called original limits. These are limits imposed not by material scarcity or political inequality but by the process of individuation itself. Lasch's account of psychic development, like Willis's, focuses on the infant's response to frustration, but more convincingly. (Willis's fullest account is in "Toward a Feminist Sexual Revolution" in *No More Nice Girls*; I have outlined Lasch's ideas at considerable length in "A Whole World of Heroes," *Dissent*, Summer 1995.) Willis's "demonizing of desire" implies parental intent, a contingent matter. But as Lasch points out, some—in fact a great deal—of infantile frustration is inevitable, as are the outsized fantasies with which the infant typically responds. These fantasies—of omnipotence or terrified helplessness, of annihilating rage or undifferentiated union, of perfectly benevolent or implacably threatening parents—must gradually be mastered, reduced in scale, if the child is to assume the contours of a self.

Living down these otherwise disabling fantasies is the essence of psychological maturation. It requires the continual experience of love and discipline, gratification and frustration, from the same source. This can best—arguably can only—be done in the constant presence of the fantasied objects, i.e., the child's parents. Until the last two centuries, it usually was. But the displacement of household production by mass production drastically altered the child's relation to its father; and the centralized, interventionist state, overshadowing and sometimes replacing parental authority, complicated maturation still further. The result was frequently a weak self, which is the clinical meaning of "narcissism." (It has nothing to do with an excess of self-love, the popular meaning of the word.)

The essence of modernity is mobility and choice; the essence of premodernity was immobility and ascription. It looks, vexingly, as though successful individuation requires an irreducible minimum of the latter. The bearer of this bad news was understandably greeted with something less than grateful enthusiasm by many of his political comrades. But when Lasch criticized modernity, he had in mind mass production and the centralized state, not sexual equality. He believed that the family needed to be defended, not against feminism but against the effects of the separation of home and work. He was skeptical of "progress," not from a dislike of equality or pleasure but from a preference for the genuine rather than the ersatz articles. He maintained that freedom meant overcoming emotionally charged dependence on individual or local authorities, not taking for granted an abstract, universal dependence on distant, bureaucratic authorities.

Culture and psychology are central to politics; Willis is right about that. But cultural

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politics must reckon with our psychic ecology, which is the sum of our adaptations, over the course of two million years, to infantile dependence, territoriality, scarcity, mortality, and the other hitherto inescapable limits of human existence. We are organisms; we cannot flourish at just any tempo, pressure, or scale. Imagination itself is, as I have suggested, an evolutionary adaptation, whereby we master a threatening environment when young by binding or investing fantasy within nearby entities—parents, neighborhood, church, ethnic group. These intense primary identifications can and should be gradually left behind, but they cannot be skipped, on pain of shallowness, instability, and—paradoxically—an inability in later life to stand firm against authority.

CULTURAL POLITICS should aim to reform rather than abolish marriage, the family, hierarchy, authority, morality, and law. These institutions and practices evolved to serve essential purposes. They are not purely, or even primarily, strategies of exploitation. To consider them prisons rather than temporary outposts is not radical but superficial, like considering religion and myth mere lies rather than inadequate attempts at explanation. Cultural radicals will sometimes, in fact, need to defend these institutions; that is, insist that some way be found to achieve their formative or protective purposes. As the global economy and mass culture lay siege to inwardness, plow up our psychic root system, and alter the very grain and contour of our being, conservation increasingly becomes a radical imperative.

Foucault remarked sourly: "We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power." There are, of course, plenty of other good reasons for saying yes to sex and to pleasures of (nearly) every other kind, as well as for demanding a fairer distribution of pleasure's prerequisites—money and leisure. But the strength to persevere in such demands and also to pursue the more sublime, more strenuous pleasures—of craft, of thought, of devotion, of emulation—is not only, as Willis contends, "the overflow of happiness"; it is also the "bitter fruit" (tart, anyway) of self-discipline. Premodern cruelties and superstitions still bulk large; left-wing libertarianism is still the best answer to them. To recognize the subtler entrapments of modernity requires, however, another variety of radical imagination. ●

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Anthropology in Public

Sherry B. Ortner

EXOTICS AT HOME: ANTHROPOLOGIES, OTHERS, AMERICAN MODERNITY
by Micaela di Leonardo
University of Chicago Press, 1998 272 pp $35

THIS BOOK addresses an important problem: the place of anthropology in America's public culture. Micaela di Leonardo, professor of anthropology and women's studies at Northwestern University, is concerned that the American public's conception of anthropology is highly stereotyped and mostly wrong, a point with which most anthropologists, including myself, would agree. Di Leonardo details the many stereotypes in play in the United States today: that anthropologists only study "primitive" societies, that we bring back "tribal wisdom" à la Carlos Castañeda, that we recover lost treasures while fighting off the "savage" à la Indiana Jones, that we teach the public's children an amoral cultural relativism, and more. As a result of these misapprehensions, anthropologists, at least in the United States, are rarely asked to contribute to public discussions of social issues "at home"; when we do try to make such contributions we are misread, misheard, our ideas distorted.

The book has a double agenda. On the one hand it traces the ways in which the world outside portrays anthropology and anthropologists and often uses these portrayals to advance problematic political agendas. On the other hand, it is an internal critique of the field, which has been dominated by a theoretical emphasis (a focus on "culture") and a methodology (ethnographic fieldwork) with which di Leonardo passionately takes issue. The nub of the argument is that it is the internal weaknesses of the field, all the kinds of anthropological work that di Leonardo does not like, that have allowed its worst tendencies to be picked up in the media and used in the service of a range of bad politics.

The ongoing saga of the popular (mis-)representation of anthropology is certainly the strongest and most interesting aspect of the book. Di Leonardo has collected an enormous array of examples from such things as World's Fairs, museum exhibits, and store window displays to novels, political tracts, and newspaper columns. The examples range from the amusing to the chilling. She begins the book with two images—of Dempster Street in Evanston, Illinois, lined with stores selling "tribal" and "ethnic" merchandise, and of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, where "living humans—Native Americans, Africans, Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners, and Southeast Asians—were displayed to a buying public in ethnological zoos." Later discussions include the use by some journalists of ethnographic formats to portray poor communities as pathological, and most recently the attacks on cultural relativism by right-wing ideologues like Dinesh d'Souza.

Di Leonardo is very good at sketching the political and economic contexts in which imaginary anthropologies are nourished. Of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, for example, she provides this backdrop:

> The American fin de siècle was a political fulcrum. It was, at one and the same time, the period of the consolidation of capitalist industrialization, of a bloody war against a significantly European immigrant labor force, and of federal abandonment of Reconstruction in the south and the establishment there of a white reign of terror against black Americans. (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, the landmark Supreme Court case establishing "separate but equal" uncivil rights, would be decided in 1896.) It

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was as well the end of the war of expropriation against Native Americans—the exposition opened only three years after the massacre at Wounded Knee—the heyday of American imperialist expansion into the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific; and the period of an ongoing Victorian woman movement still tinged by racist and classist response to short-lived post-Civil War black male suffrage. The complicated politics of this fulcrum period were exceedingly well represented in the structures and processes of the Chicago fair.

BUT WHAT is the relationship between the racism of some of the exhibits or other forms of "public anthropology" and what anthropologists were actually trying to do? It is certainly the case that some individual anthropologists have actively participated in the construction of public anthropologies. For example, Harvard anthropologist F.W. Putnam nominally headed an "anthropological wing" of the fair. But it is not clear how active a role he played, and in fact the huckster who organized the "ethnological zoo" complained that Putnam's role was entirely counterproductive. Later figures like Margaret Mead (whose career plays a major role in di Leonardo's story) quite intentionally sought to shape public understanding of "anthropology," but even in her case it is clear that Mead had little control over the ways in which her work and even her persona were represented in the media. And so the story goes, up through the "debate" between anthropologists Bradd Shore and Derek Freeman on the *Donahue* show, in which the audience was more or less equally hostile to both of them, and culminating in di Leonardo's own experience of the futility of trying to educate a *Newsweek* reporter doing a story on sociobiological theories of physical beauty. In every case it is clear that what the public sees and hears as "anthropology" has little to do with what the anthropologists were trying to say, and that a much more complex process was at work between the production and the reception of the images.

My own sense is that a certain kind of simple-minded anthropology enters the popular discourse not from anthropologists trying to intervene in that discourse—interventions that almost always have very mixed results—but largely from their teaching a watered-down "introductory anthropology" course to university students. If we anthropologists want to get these images under better control we might think more about how we teach Anthropology 101, the only exposure to the field that most students get before they go out in the world and become, among other things, journalists. But di Leonardo does not address teaching; her main concern is to link the bad anthropologies in the public arena to the hegemony of anthropologies she does not like within the field itself.

This is where the problems begin, because di Leonardo's complaints about what's wrong with anthropology, at least in the context of this book, seem to be a good twenty years out of date. Di Leonardo sees an anthropology that has gone the wrong way, emphasizing "culture" and "ethnography" instead of the hard, objective realities of political-economic forces impinging on people's lives. But the battle between anthropologists holding up the banner for either "culture" or "political economy" was largely fought out in the sixties and the seventies, and the field has come a long way since then.

My own position (which I need to declare at the outset, since di Leonardo locates me on the wrong side of all her issues) is not anti–political economy, but anti- the idea that just because people live within political and economic constraints (and privileges) they do not also live within a world of "culture"—of images and representations that have other kinds of power over their lives. As I will discuss a bit below, the study of culture is not, as she assumes, necessarily uncritical and apolitical, nor does one have to choose between an interest in culture and an interest in political economy.

Di Leonardo criticizes the idea of "culture" from several different angles. One line of criticism departs from the famous passage in Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History*, attacking the anthropological penchant for studying people grouped into "cultures," that is, for chopping the world up into separate groups and studying them for their internal coherence, rather than recognizing the ways

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in which these entities are parts, and products, of larger systems of political and economic relations. She writes:

> Eric Wolf has argued forcefully that "the concept of the autonomous, self-regulating and self-justifying society and culture has trapped anthropology within the bounds of its own definition . . . . By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls."

The billiard balls image then becomes one of the running tropes of di Leonardo's book, as she seems to assume that nothing has happened in the field since the early eighties, when Wolf published his critique. In fact the critique was widely recognized as important and was picked up by a broad spectrum of anthropologists, including many whom di Leonardo would include among the culturalists and (worse yet) the "postmodernists" to whom she is so opposed.

By now it would be impossible to find an anthropological project constructed as a simple study of the cultural beliefs or the social organization of the Soandso. I recently reviewed three collections of articles on the theme of "the future of anthropology," and there was not a single study of the billiard ball sort. Anthropologists these days are studying everything under the sun, "at home" and abroad, and with a wide array of methods. (One of the collections I reviewed, for example, contained anthropological studies of contemporary scientific practices, transnational business networks, tourism, environmentalism, and local guerrilla movements, and AIDS discourse among medical practitioners.) If di Leonardo were concerned to communicate to a general public what anthropologists are really doing these days, and to combat stereotypes of the intrepid anthropologist going off to study the bare-breasted maidens of "primitive" societies, she might have done well to spend some time on the extraordinary range of contemporary anthropological projects, many of them deeply concerned with the same social issues that concern her.

Closely tied to the critique of anthropology's focus on discrete "cultures" has been a critique of the emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork as the field's core methodology. The practice of fieldwork in a single place, in this view, tends to overemphasize local patterns of life and obscure larger political-economic forces that cannot be studied "on the ground." At one point di Leonardo seems to defend the practice of ethnographic fieldwork, criticizing a particular sociologist for doing "fake ethnography" with the "appearance—but not the discipline—of ethnographic work." In fact, however, di Leonardo's position on fieldwork is best represented by Stephen Steinberg's discussion of "the ethnographic fallacy," which she quotes with approval:

> Too often—not always—ethnography suffers from a myopia that sharply delineates the behavior at close range but obscures the less proximate and less visible structures and processes that engender and sustain that behavior.

It is true that fieldwork can have this narrowing effect, and it is true that many early ethnographers tended to ignore "larger processes," whether in the form of outside forces descending upon people (missionization, colonialism, military occupations) or in the form of pressures compelling people to change their lives for the worse (wage labor, urban slums, alcoholism, and depression). Yet the ethnographic endeavor has been changing for some time, including not only new kinds of projects, but new ways of doing ethnography—expanding it in space (through multi-sited fieldwork), and time (through linking ethnographic and historical perspectives), and combining it with a variety of other methodologies (for example, media studies)—all to escape the "timeless island" effect that is by now widely questioned. Di Leonardo never actually advocates dropping ethnographic fieldwork, but she complains a lot about its limitations, does not acknowledge the many new developments, and generally seems to relegate it to a marginal position within the field.

In contrast, most anthropologists would

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insist that ethnography must remain central to the practice of anthropology. It has at least one important benefit that di Leonardo does not appreciate, in this case because of another of her problems with "culture." "Culture" in this sense refers to systems of representations—the terms and forms and images and categories through which people understand and live their lives. It includes things like worldviews and values, not only the world as it "really" is, but the world as people see it. Political economic analysis, which remains at the level of "objective" structures, cannot get at these forms of what Clifford Geertz called "local knowledge." Only ethnography allows one access to both the terms in which people apprehend the world and the networks of relations that shape those terms.

For di Leonardo, the study of "culture" in this sense is eternally opposed to, and even inimical to, the study of materiality and power. The case that is always used to make this point, not only in this book but in many others, is the idea of the "culture of poverty," in which some researcher goes into a (usually African-American) community, sees the difficult and sometimes violent life in that community, and blames it on their "culture" instead of on the material deprivations and powerlessness, and the racism from the dominant society, that trap them in this situation. If we think of "culture" in the "culture of poverty" sense, we do indeed blame the victim. Yet this has never been the central usage of the idea of culture, and is—in light of ongoing internal critique within the field—even less so today. Rather, its central meaning, and the meaning that gives ethnographic fieldwork its continuing importance, is as the webs of values and intentions and desires embodied in public forms of all kinds within specific communities of people. These communities are not imagined as harmonious wholes; they have their divisions and differences and conflicts, and these all shift and change over time. But the cultural anthropologist would insist that people nonetheless operate according to terms that they define from their own points of view, or at least try to. What's wrong with a culture of poverty argument is that it denies this process of local meaning-making; what's right about ethnography at its best is that it seeks to recognize and illuminate and understand this process.

Because di Leonardo despises "culture," she fails to make these distinctions. And because she is locked into a simple culture-vs.-political economy dualism, she is left with a narrow political economy perspective that undermines what she was trying to do with this book. It weakens some of her own interpretations (for example, of the treatment of women and gender in anthropological studies), and prevents her from giving her readers an accurate picture of what is really going on in the anthropology of the late twentieth century.

Let's start with the women and gender question. Although *Exotics at Home* is not primarily about gender issues, di Leonardo uses the anthropological treatment of women and gender (she calls this, quite infelicitously, the "dusky maiden" theme) as one of her unifying threads. Yet di Leonardo does not seem to have any consistent theoretical strategy for dealing with these issues. Thus in one case—a critique of Janet Siskind's *To Hunt in the Morning*—di Leonardo's point is that the ethnographer, while purporting to study gender relations, mostly discusses men and male politics as enacted through control over women. In another case—a critique of Robert and Yolanda Murphy's *Men and Women of the Forest*—the issue is that, although the ethnographers do attend to women, their interpretations are either too Freudian or too ethnocentric. Finally, discussing two works that allow women to speak at great length in their own terms—Marjorie Shostak's ethno-biography *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, and the film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*—di Leonardo criticizes them because they focus too heavily on the intimate details of the women's lives, and fail to give due attention to the ways in which the !Kung San people as a whole have been proletarianized and impoverished. Although di Leonardo's critique of the anthropological representations of the !Kung San situation is compelling, the gender question here simply disappears.

There are, I think, several things going on behind this inconsistent critique of early gen-

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der anthropology. One is that di Leonardo more or less ignores a good twenty-five years of feminist theory, both inside and outside of the field. Much of this work has established the point that gender inequality cannot be reduced to political-economic inequality, and that it operates to a significant extent on a distinct logic. Gender, like race, overlaps in many ways with class and other forms of economic inequality; feminist theory is concerned precisely with both the distinctive logic of gender inequality and the ways in which it articulates with these other forms. As di Leonardo does not draw on any of this literature, she remains stuck in a straightforward political economy perspective that is inadequate for developing a rich critique (or, for that matter, a rich appreciation) of this work.

Di Leonardo's anticulturalism also prevents her from acknowledging a range of new cultural work that has gone beyond the tired oppositions of the seventies and that is not in fact incompatible with the kind of critical anthropology she would like to see. The first is the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of "cultural studies," which for the most part focuses on interpretations of "public culture"—usually media imagery. Some of the work takes a "postmodern" turn, interpreting the images for their psychological effects on a kind of unspecified and undifferentiated community. But a good part of it—for example, that of Stuart Hall on media, George Lipsitz on popular culture, or Susan Bordo on rock stars and advertising—is concerned with the power and the possibilities of cultural images, and with the processes of cultural production, in relation to problems of globalizing capital, class polarization, sexism and racism, and so on.

"Cultural studies" as an interdisciplinary arena stands both inside and outside of "anthropology" as a traditional discipline. The relationships between the two kinds of work are complex. Because cultural studies work is usually not based on ethnographic fieldwork, it is usually not seen as "anthropology." At the same time, many anthropologists have recognized the importance of understanding the workings of "public culture" and have sought to incorporate it into their practices. Many of them have, moreover, been doing this kind of work with precisely the politically critical sensibilities that di Leonardo calls for.

THE OTHER major direction in which cultural work has gone in the past two decades has been focused on theorizing the relationship between cultural forms and the contexts of their emergence, operation, and transformation. This work, which has no general name, goes more in the direction of classic "social science," but instead of polarizing the relationship between cultural forms and social (including political-economic) processes, it seeks to understand the ways in which they shape one another. Like cultural studies work, which operates on the borders between media studies, literary studies, and anthropology, this kind of work operates on the borders between anthropology, sociology (more of the French and English than the American sort), and history.

This work—let us call it, just to have a label, "critical social theory"—also takes a variety of forms. It includes the writings of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, English sociologist Anthony Giddens, American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, Indian historians of the so-called subaltern studies school, American political scientist James Scott, and some of my own work. In all of this scholarship there is a move beyond the duality of culture vs. political economy toward a systematic address of the ways in which these processes interact in practice, especially in the context of all forms of social and economic inquality.

In sum, in the past two decades or so anthropology has entered into a range of exchanges with other disciplines that has enriched and transformed its theoretical orientations and its empirical work (and that has, I dare say, transformed those other disciplines as well). Over the same period, anthropology has been engaged in self-scrutiny concerning fieldwork practices that once assumed a world that could be divided up into "anthropologists" and "natives," and concerning fieldwork methods designed for islands and villages in faraway places. Contemporary anthropological projects are worlds away from these kinds of assumptions, both ethically and practically. But this message you will not get from *Exotics at Home*.

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I cannot end this review without a few words about di Leonardo's style, which is part and parcel of the way in which she constructs the project as a whole. She has, first of all, no compunction about describing work with which she disagrees in extraordinarily insulting language. Margaret Mead is first introduced as follows: She "turned in her master's thesis to Columbia University in 1924 at age twenty-two, died in 1978 at age seventy-six, and simply *never shut up* in all the long years . . . in between" (italics in original). We are told later about Mead's "kindergarten-like account of the mind" of her teacher, the founder of American anthropology, Franz Boas; Mead's most well-known book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, is described as being written "in the style of children's literature." Other scholars come in for similar treatment. Some are said to be claiming "a kind of permanent adolescence, or court jester status, among intellectuals"; a little further down the page they are described as taking on the role of "class clown."

And then there is the heavy tone of political judgment. Di Leonardo divides the world of anthropology into friends (of the same intellectual/political persuasion as herself) and enemies (lumped together in a kind of catch-all "postmodernism"). The enemies get treated to the sarcastic and withering (and often inaccurate) critiques just noted, yet even the friends do not always pass easily through the eye of di Leonardo's exceedingly fine political needle. "Edward Said is a wonderful change from this brand of postmodernist poseur—but even Said nods . . . " Stephan Thernstrom fought the good fight against a certain kind of ethnographic study of race and ethnicity to which di Leonardo is opposed, yet ultimately he "capitulated" to it. David Hollinger is one of the "good guys" (her term) on issues of race and ethnicity, but even he "founders" on issues of gender. And finally, on anthropologist Kathleen Gough's study of the dynamics of matrilineal kinship: "The times were such that even an anthropologist of impeccable left and later feminist credentials like Kathleen Gough" failed to make the correct political analysis of these systems. A few of di Leonardo's allies escape without these kinds of judgments—Eleanor Leacock, Sidney Mintz—but by and large she seems incapable of refraining from finding a bad word about everybody.

Finally, there is not a shred of humor. Although a recent Roz Chast cartoon of a (silly-looking, of course) pith-helmeted anthropologist visiting some natives of a New Yorkish apartment building made me laugh, I immediately felt guilty for doing so. I was sure that di Leonardo would not be amused.

Micaela di Leonardo is right to worry about the public standing of anthropology, which sometimes seems to have become everybody's favorite academic villain. But the question of the "public standing of anthropology" is a "cultural" question—a question of the production and consumption of images and interpretations. The ultimate irony of *Exotics at Home* is that, because di Leonardo is so hostile to an examination of cultural processes, she is unable to come up with a persuasive argument about why the representations of anthropology in the public domain are so bad and what we might do to fix them.

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How to Make a Rhyme of a Mystery?

John Palattella

JUNETEENTH
by Ralph Ellison
edited by John F. Callahan
Random House, 1999 384pp $25

RALPH ELLISON'S posthumous novel, *Juneteenth*, has become a book mired in charges of betrayal, and its editor, John Callahan, has been hounded for overseeing the desecration and counterfeit resurrection of a literary corpse. Greg Tate, writing in the *Village Voice* in July, is typical of the novel's many detractors. "Suffice it to say, all claims that the version of Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* cobbled together by literary executor John Callahan is Ellison's last novel or even an Ellison novel at all, are monstrously fraudulent. More than a sham, the posthumous *Juneteenth* is a mockery of the sacred and once considered inviolable bond between the artist and his work. . .Merely reading this *Juneteenth*. . .makes one feel complicit in a literary crime, each turn of the page an aiding and abetting of Callahan's callow butchery."

Shame on Callahan, in other words. As if Callahan, who has edited well-received collections of Ellison's short stories and essays, and is working on an edition of the novelist's letters, doesn't know the first thing about textual editing, let alone the proportions of Ellison's art. As if Callahan and Fanny Ellison, the novelist's widow, haven't managed the editing and publishing of *Juneteenth* with dignity and caution. Callahan spent three years quarrying a coherent, 350-page narrative from a 1,500-page manuscript that Ellison started in 1952 and left unfinished when he died in 1994. "I came to believe and discern this narrative, *Juneteenth*, was the part [Ellison] returned to most often and came back to with the greatest care," Callahan told the *Washington Post* in June. "It was a question of discerning sequence, sorting out the occasional differences between his pagination and his notes of intention. . .There are some loose ends in the book. And where Ellison didn't work it out, I thought it was better to let it be suggested." Callahan has rolled a big boulder up a steep hill. But never mind. Most critics want to roll it right back down.

Which shouldn't deter anyone from reading the book. Yes, Random House does deserve some jabs for dubbing *Juneteenth* Ralph Ellison's "triumphant second novel." Ellison never finished his second novel; Callahan has culled from it the portion that, to his mind, best cohered into a novel. And yes, the novel does contain those loose ends. What posthumous work doesn't? Still, as critics have saddled up their white stallions and charged forward to protect Ellison's laurels, they have treated the meaning of *Juneteenth* as something of an afterthought.

This is unnerving because *Juneteenth* is also about betrayals and counterfeit resurrections, and they are more absorbing than those supposedly pertaining to the novel's release. As in *Invisible Man*, Ellison's obsession in *Juneteenth* is American identity—a rich, bewildering metaphysic of individuality and tradition wherein self-invention can morph into self-deception and race can just as easily confound as enrich a sense of self. There are too many of Ellison's trademark double-edged plots and ironic reversals in *Juneteenth*, and too much of his vivid delirious prose for the book to be the ersatz Ellison novel condemned by Tate and others. There is a catastrophe regarding *Juneteenth*, but it's not the book's publication. Rather, it is the delusion and self-hatred that racism breeds in the novel's protagonist.

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In "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Mask of Humanity," published a year after *Invisible Man*, Ellison upbraided a handful of modernist novelists for ignoring what he considered the central tragedy of the nation, one confronted honestly by Twain and Melville in the previous century: how the citizens of a democracy could blind themselves to the enslavement of blacks. "Thus on the moral level I propose that we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds," Ellison declared. The assumption he wanted novelists to battle is the one pinning his Gulliver down—that the archetypal American, with all his or her aspirations to equality, liberty, and individuality, is white.

IN *INVISIBLE MAN* the trapped figure is the narrator: racism makes him invisible to others while his indecision about the direction of his life makes him invisible to himself. One of the many surprises of *Juneteenth* is that the trapped figure is a race-baiting Northern senator, Adam Sunraider, who has disguised the fact that he was raised as a light-skinned black. Set in the mid-1950s, *Juneteenth* spirals out from a single event: a hospital vigil following the attempted assassination of Sunraider by a black man named Severen. Sunraider has summoned to his bedside a preacher, Reverend Alonzo Hickman, who was on Capitol Hill with his flock, having led a march on Washington from Georgia in a failed attempt to warn Sunraider that his life was in jeopardy. Considering the Senator's politics and the fact that Hickman is black, the preacher's concern is a surprise.

But soon we learn that Sunraider was once an orphan named Bliss, and that Bliss was raised by Hickman. Hickman tries to console the Senator by encouraging him to delve into the past they shared, but this only deepens Sunraider's wounds, since his memories return him to an adolescence wracked by doubts about his origins. Ellison never reveals to the reader Bliss's true racial makeup, and Hickman never reveals to Bliss the circumstances of his birth. Living with this ambiguity agonizes Bliss (though it shouldn't agonize readers), and he eventually lights out for white America—or at least what he thinks it to be.

The route back to Hickman's and Bliss's past is hardly direct and true. When Severen fires his pistol, one of his shots goes astray and shatters a chandelier hanging above the Senate well. *Juneteenth*, which breaks the past lives of Hickman and Bliss into fragments, resembles the pieces of glass that shower down on Sunraider. Some pieces of the book are as intricate as flakes of fallen snow; others are jagged gems, and still others shards. What shapes the pieces into a pattern is a series of conversations between Hickman and Bliss, who trade remarks in the hospital just as they did at Baptist revival meetings a half-century before, when their call-and-response exchanges sent listeners into a frenzy.

In his working notes for the novel, Ellison wrote that "Bliss symbolizes for Hickman an American solution as well as a religious possibility. Hickman thinks of Negroes as the embodiment of American democratic promises, as the last who are fated to become first, the downtrodden who shall be exalted." Hickman raises Bliss as someone destined to liberate his people. He schools him in Gospel truths about humility, perseverance, and redemption, and he wastes no effort making the boy a symbol of new life. As part of the revival-meeting routine, Hickman would dress Bliss in a suit of white satin and enclose him in a coffin outfitted with a concealed breathing tube. At a prearranged moment in Hickman's sermon, the coffin would open and Bliss would rise up, his counterfeit resurrection sending the assembled worshippers into ecstasy. Ellison pokes fun at this ritual, emphasizing Bliss's very human feeling of claustrophobia in the coffin and the vaudeville tricks that prop up Hickman's religious allegory. But Ellison also endorses the ritual's vitality by casting Hickman's sermons in a lyrical prose that mixes incantatory rhythms and idiomatic expressions. These stem-winders are among the most moving passages in the book.

All of Hickman's homespun art, however, can't keep Bliss from betraying the preacher's hopes. Bliss's transformation into a prodigal son begins at a revival meeting commemorat-

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ing Juneteenth, that day in 1865 when, two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Union troops landed in Galveston, Texas, and informed the gathered slaves that they were free. A white woman disrupts Hickman's religious vaudeville during the resurrection scene and, clawing at the still-interred Bliss, screams, "He's mine, MINE!. . . You gypsy niggers stole him, my baby." Several deaconesses wrestle the woman to the ground and a few others whisk Bliss away to safety. The woman, who is not Bliss's mother, has caused untold damage nonetheless, having lodged in his mind doubts about his birthright. Soon he embarks on a pilgrimage to whiteness. He becomes a tireless moviegoer who sees his mother in the white heroines of the silver screen. He steals away from Hickman and hits the road, first as an itinerant preacher, then as a grifter and movie maker, and finally as a senator who is a wizard of demagogery. (Unfortunately, one of the novel's loose ends is Sunraider's rise to power, which is not chronicled at all.)

By spurning Hickman's expectations, Bliss gains a certain degree of freedom. Why, one can imagine him telling Hickman, should I alone shoulder the burden of your dreams of racial uplift? By undertaking a journey of self-discovery that discards various archetypes of black life, Bliss follows in the footsteps of Ellison's invisible man. Both cast off borrowed clothes. Whereas the invisible man refuses to be a black power militant and a communist flunky, Bliss rejects Hickman's anointing of him as the savior of the race.

But Bliss's search for freedom endorses the very belief—that to be American one must be white—that keeps the eponymous narrator of *Invisible Man* in chains. Bliss also refuses to acknowledge a principle that Hickman, and Ellison, thought no less vital than Emancipation itself: that black culture and American culture are inextricably bound up with each other,that the hyphen in African-American is a link forged as much from fusion as *frisson*. To Sunraider's great distress, the culture he absorbed at Hickman's side and subsequently estranges himself from proves irrepressible. When he is shot he cries out, "Lord, LAWD. . .WHY HAST THOU. . ." The vernacular of the revival circuit breaks through; Sunraider's self-betrayal is no less absolute than his betrayal of Hickman. "Lord, what a country this is. Even his name's not his own name. Made himself from the ground up, you might say," Hickman admits to himself about the Senator. Hickman is right. Sunraider makes no claims on the past; he is his own man—and is gunned down for what he has become.

Although the antiphonal structure of the novel unites Hickman and Sunraider in the embrace of speech and memory, their recollections of the past never come into alignment. Hickman hopes the senator's resurrection of his long-buried childhood will somehow return him to the fold and prompt him to embrace the role of liberator for which Hickman prepared him. "But time turns, Bliss, and remembering helps us to save ourselves. Somewhere through all the falseness and the forgetting there is something solid and good," he explains in the early hours of his bedside vigil. Hickman wants to embody for Sunraider what Mary Rambo, the transplanted Southerner who operates a boardinghouse in Harlem, embodies for the narrator of *Invisible Man*: a stable, familiar force from the past.

Hickman's hopes again go unfulfilled. In the novel's closing pages, Sunraider falls into a fever dream of approaching death; it culminates in a hallucination of three vengeful blacks driving a hot rod and trying to run him down. "*And it came to the Senator that he was watching no ordinary automobile. This was no Cadillac, no Lincoln, Oldsmobile or Buick—nor any other known make of machine....It was a junkyard sculpture mechanized! An improvisation, a bastard creation of black bastards.*" This episode circles back to a moment early in the novel when the senator, shortly before he is shot, makes a reference in his speech to what he brands the "Coon Cage Eight," thereby mocking African-Americans' supposed love of fancy cars. Despite Hickman's counsel the delirious Sunraider remains unrepentant, and a stereotype he exploited repeatedly wings him away to hell.

"For, like most everyone in our country, I

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started out with my share of optimism," muses the narrator of *Invisible Man*, deep in his coal chute redoubt. "I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after being 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities. What a phrase—still it's a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn't accept any other; that much I've learned underground."

Although Ellison chided interviewers who asked him if *Invisible Man* was an autobiographical novel, he never shied away from explaining how his life was proof that such infinite possibilities could be realized. To critics like Irving Howe, who chastised the author of *Invisible Man* for not writing protest novels like Richard Wright's, Ellison replied with quiet pride that he had schooled himself in Thomas Stearns Eliot as much James Weldon Johnson, in Ernest Hemingway as much as Langston Hughes. Ellison had plenty of clenched militancy; it was just not the kind that Wright embodied and Howe championed. When Ellison protested, it was usually against the notion that literary and cultural influences flow along tidy racial and ethnic lines. He never tired of defending his variegated literary roots.

Juneteenth invokes a day of liberation, but the relationship between Bliss and Hickman leads one to wonder if Ellison ever believed wholeheartedly that emancipation could be achieved or that the integration of the imagination he had achieved and defiantly defended would ever be matched by that most infinite of possibilities—the integration of American society. Of course, there's plenty of aesthetic mixing and mashing in *Juneteenth*: African-American folklore crossed with Christian mythology, the dozens filtered through Joycean stream of consciousness. Still, the novel stands as a check on Ellison's celebrated optimism. Sunraider glides through the nation's corridors of power but only after taking revenge on his own racially and culturally hybrid past. He lives in a cultural void created by his unbridled optimism—a nostalgia for the future that liquidates the past. Hickman believes in racial equality but his optimism is yoked to his sense of humanity's innate fallibility: *"Faith in the Lord and Master is easy compared to having faith in the goodness of man," he admits. "There are simply too many snares and delusions, too many masks, too many forked tongues. Too much grit in the spiritual greens."* And even when in the hospital the two men stir up memories about their shared past, their collaboration springs mostly from antagonism.

In the opening pages of *Juneteenth* a contingent from Hickman's congregation accompanies him to Sunraider's office; Ellison describes the churchfolk as "resigned, like people embarked on a difficult journey who were already far beyond the point of no return." By the end of *Juneteenth*, it's hard not to conclude that Ellison was among that tragically minded group. ●

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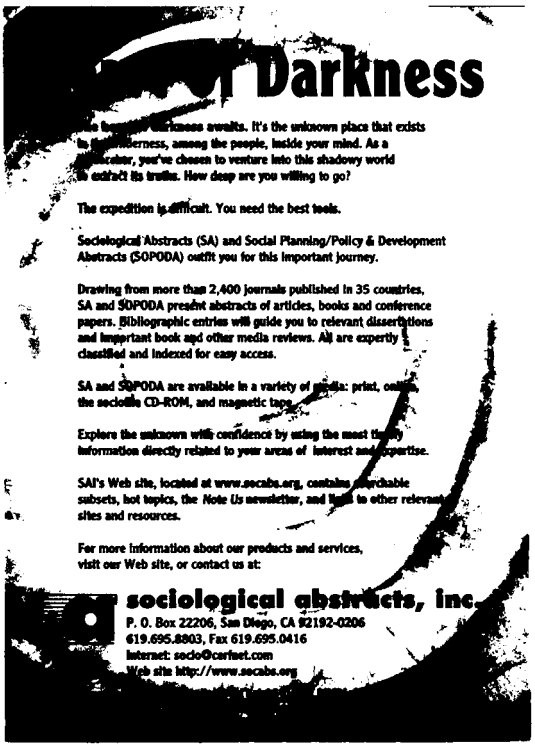

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The Textual Vibe

Rick Perlstein

THE LAST INNOCENT YEAR:
AMERICA IN 1964:
THE BEGINNING OF THE "SIXTIES"
by Jon Margolis
William Morrow & Company, 1999 401 pp $25

I HAVE BEEN thinking a lot, lately, about what it is history professors do, what jour-nalists who write history do, and what the difference is. Recently, I wrote a profile of the Stanford historian David Kennedy, whose *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* is the most recent volume in the monumental Oxford History of the United States series. Two of the rare historians who enjoyed the esteem both of their professional community and the common reader, Richard Hofstadter and C. Vann Woodward, around 1960, endeavored to institutionalize their accomplishment by commissioning major synthetic treatments of American history that married gripping narrative to scholarly rigor. Kennedy's volume is a masterpiece, fulfilling in every way Hofstadter and Woodward's grand vision—delightful enough to take to the beach; rigorous enough to turn to for reference in any dozen topics in financial, social, diplomatic, military, cultural, and legal history. *Freedom From Fear* is the series' fourth book. The history profession so militates against producing scholars willing and able to write this way, a ninety-year-old C. Vann Woodward told me when I reached him by phone, that he doesn't expect to live to witness the publication of another volume in the series.

When I interviewed Kennedy, he ticked off the names of some journalistic historians who have gladly filled the gap: Doris Kearns Goodwin, David McCullough, Taylor Branch. Where historians are not, journalists will be—which is not always to the good. He might have added that these are authors the president of the United States has been known to savor. The *New York Times* recently published a piece about Bill Clinton's reading habits. The article told of the briefings the new president had received on the possibility of launching strikes against Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic-cleansing forces. The Common Reader in Chief strolled into one of the meetings carrying a book—*Balkan Ghosts*, by the journalist Robert Kaplan, who has never seen a reductionist portrait of a foreign clime that he didn't like—that he said had convinced him that ethnic conflict in that region was so primordial, so ineluctable, of such ancient provenance, that the world was helpless to try to do anything about it. It was only years later, when Clinton got his hands on a more scholarly account of the subject published by an academic press, Noel Malcolm's *Bosnia: A Short History*, that he allowed the Serbs the same tangled motives—answerable to the same disincentives—as every other group of mortal human beings.

It wasn't world historic, but I thought back to my experience in a history seminar during my short graduate school career. We were reading Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of serious journalistic history for the way it smoothly intercuts between the life histories of two black families who found their way to Chicago after World War II, the bureaucratic battles in Washington over the War on Poverty, and back to Chicago to examine how its programs did and did not work on the ground—finishing with a set of very specific, hard-headed, aggressively social democratic policy recommendations gleaned from the tale.

Acknowledged as a masterpiece, that is, by just about everyone but my graduate seminar.

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To them—to us—it was a pathetic piece of *journalism* (my professor spit out the word with the venom of someone who had something precious stolen from him). We never got to Lemann's discussion of its policy prescriptions because we were too busy superciliously abusing him for not "problematizing race." Not to let Lemann off the hook. *The Promised Land* bears many of the faults that, I think, only a journalistic history can—most conspicuously the bizarre but narratively convenient claim (he begins his book with the dramatic scene) that one of the grandest mass migrations in human history was set off entirely by the first public demonstration of the mechanical cotton picker on October 2, 1944. It is an embarrassing flaw in an otherwise marvelous book. And if he were a professor—reading his work before colleagues, distributing drafts to helpful experts, seeing his manuscript vetted by readers at journals and presses—it never would have seen print.

HISTORIANS AND theorists have spewed reams from computer printers in the last ten years or so about how stories work. People tell stories about themselves when they think they're just writing objective analysis, these theorists argue, or reveal underlying power relations when they think they're merely giving pleasure. The opposite side of the issue, though, has been more neglected. Not how we shape stories, but how stories shape us: what kinds of power they exert over us when we think we're taking mere pleasure, how the conjuring up of a certain textual *vibe* does more analytic work than a thousand data points. How stories stick to your brain. You remember them. Sometimes, if you're a politician, you act on them.

I say all this because it's taken me that much work to figure out why I have been having a harder time than usual deciding whether the book under review is good, bad, or excellent. *The Last Innocent Year: America in 1964: The Beginning of the "Sixties"* is the product of Jon Margolis, the *Chicago Tribune*'s longtime chief Washington correspondent, now retired. He is, in other words, a storyteller. The result, as *Publishers Weekly*'s starred review (excerpted on the back), puts it, is "a breezily well-written, episodically structured book that reads so much like a good PBS film documentary that readers will be creating soundtracks in their own minds."

It's better than it sounds.The title suggests a gimmick, a confusion of an accident of number with the quickening of history. I've spent the last thirty months working on a book on the 1964 presidential election and the rise of the conservative movement, though, and I think his thesis is sound. At the front end of the "long 1964," the latest bout of American innocence ended when a president was gunned down in the street; by the middle of 1965, enough had happened to make people wonder why they ever believed in innocence in the first place. Johnson initiated the bombing of Vietnam, then sent in the Marines; the bloody scene at the Edmond Pettis bridge in Selma removed any illusions about whether America was at war over race; Watts went up in flames.

Margolis spells out what happened in between with remarkable skill and economy. The Beatles appeared on Ed Sullivan; this book sets the context by explaining that a month earlier, Sullivan's biggest coup was landing an appearance by the Singing Nun. In that same dark night when *The Beverly Hillbillies* topped the ratings, irreverence invaded pop culture in the form of the pre-*Saturday Night Live* antics of *That Was The Week That Was*. Andy Warhol was in flower; Timothy Leary repaired to a farm outside Poughkeepsie to experiment with LSD full time; Ken Kesey's pranksters took their merry bus trip. There were wellsprings of détente in January when President Johnson, in an extraordinary act of courage and parliamentary skill, muscled through the sale of surplus wheat to the Soviet Union; then in August he lied about the Gulf of Tonkin to escalate the Vietnam War. Bobby Kennedy began his rocky, arrested journey to the stewardship of American liberalism. The managerial-liberal love affair between Big Business and government reached its public apotheosis in Robert Moses's glittering World's Fair in Flushing, and its private one in the rise of the WEST consortium, which oversaw the turnover of public lands to western power companies. That catalyzed the takeoff of the environmental movement, even as the New Left

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began to stir, inspired by Berkeley, the Gulf of Tonkin, by the great dreams of the newly announced War on Poverty, by Freedom Summer, and by the sellout of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in Atlantic City. Consensus liberalism entered one of its most dramatic crises in credibility: the baffling outbreak of race riots in the North weeks after the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act.

But what is most impressive about this book is not how he handles the stories, but the backstory—how he creates its textual vibe. America *changed* on or around...well, pick your date. It could have been the day a young man burned his draft card in Union Square in New York with the declaration, "The basic issue is my right of choice." Or that day the Beatles arrived on the tarmac in New York and inaugurated a debate that made it seem that whether you were for or against a pop band was almost a *political* issue. It could have been the first time a white SNCC volunteer came back to school wearing farmer's overalls, or when Bob Dylan blew into an SDS national council meeting and slurred, "Ah don't know what you all are talking about, but it sounds like you want something to happen, and if that's what you want, that's what ah want"—or when Nat Hentoff and labor secretary Willard Wirtz went on a walking tour of Harlem and Wirtz asked a teenager whether he was looking for a job. The kid replied, "Why?" and Hentoff called that "a healthy reaction to a sick society." It could be dated to May 22, 1964, when in his famous "Great Society" address, Lyndon Johnson, the man who had acceded to the presidency with an image as a plodding time-server, spoke of creating an America "where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community."

The backstory is politics becoming not just a question of who gets what and how, but a quest after authenticity, meaning, and dignity, in a manner more associated with existentialist philosophy; politics, in short, was becoming a theater of the self—where, as Margolis observes of SNCC leaders like John Lewis, "the method by which one achieved one's goal was part of the goal." Nor, by any means, was this the sole province of the left. It was ecumenical, a zeitgeist; even a society for the refurbishment of centrist Republicanism proclaimed themselves in their founding statement (which Margolis does not quote) "fiery moderates." It was very much a part of the bad-faith populism of George Wallace in the Democratic primary in the spring; "There are those who would amalgamate us into a unit of the one," he cried, "subservient to a powerful central government, with laws designed to equalize us into the common denominator necesary for a slave people." And then, of course, there was Barry Goldwater. Goldwater rarely made a speech where he didn't accuse his opponent of soulless materialism. Or, as he put it when accepting the Republican nomination: "There's a virtual despair among the many who look beyond material successes toward the inner meaning of their lives."

Margolis evokes the mood wonderfully. It is a question, really, of *writing*: hints dropped, scenes set, apt details. I'm not sure many orthodox scholarly historians could pull it off. Is it such a bad thing to have a reader playing a soundtrack in her mind when you're trying to evoke the past?

WHICH BRINGS me to the other side of my evaluation. No scholar could put out a book with this many mistakes. For young ones it would be a tenure-breaker, for old ones a reputation-breaker. And not just because only every fifth fact gets a footnote.

I offer a stratified sample from my area of expertise. Of those wartime conscientious objectors who deployed the politics of personalism to defend their decision, Margolis makes an aside: "At the time, no one seems to have noticed that although the foreign policy of these young pacifists was as far as it could be from that of the Young Americans for Freedom, (YAF) their insistence on the individual's autonomy was similar." He hasn't read too many primary sources. In fact that point was often made, in, among other places, this magazine, whose editor, a certain Irving Howe, wrote that YAF's "concern for the preservation of personal initiative in a bureaucratic society is something an intelligent radical ought to accept."

There are garbled facts. William Rusher is

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identified as editor of *National Review* where he was the publisher (to make that mistake obscures the towering role of William F. Buckley). The impressario of Goldwater's nomination was Clif, not "Cliff," White. NBC's John Chancellor was escorted off the floor of the Republican National Convention by local police, not by White's security forces. A statement of Goldwater's is described as "recent" although he had made it four years earlier. Margolis says a White House meeting with Goldwater in July was about Vietnam when it was about civil rights. He writes, "it was the Birchers who created the nucleus of the political organization that Cliff White was creating," which is akin to saying that members of the Communist Party were the nucleus of Americans for Democratic Action. Both wrote their constitutions to *ecraser l'infame*. Elsewhere, when he mentions that the Goldwater campaign predicted early on that it had locked up 451 delegates, Margolis says that all of them came from southern states, when only half did. Half right, sometimes, is all wrong—like saying, as Margolis does, that A.J. Muste had "vaguely left-wing leanings." But let us excuse these; to correct them serves mostly to mark the reviewer as a pedant.

Other mistakes, however, are land mines in the way of the story he's trying to tell. Barry Goldwater, Margolis writes, thought "unions were dangerous, almost un-American." It seems an unobjectionable point—Goldwater first made his name as a young senator by savaging Walter Reuther—but to leave it at that begs every question. There is, of course, an inglorious tradition in American conservatism of attacking unions as dangerous and un-American, often at the point of National Guard rifles. But one of the things that made the conservatism of Barry Goldwater new was that he was forever saying things like "I'll fight anyone who tries to destroy unions." Yet at the same time he fought against the union shop—he called it "compulsory unionism"—through "right-to-work" laws; and against labor influence in politics by arguing that using union dues to support liberal candidates violated the First Amendment rights of members who were conservative. Mobilizing such shimmering American ideals to restrict organized labor to the narrowest possible role was a far more powerful weapon against it than any million Pinkertons. Margolis is not just in error here; he misses the point—his own point, of the power of the existentialist ideal of autonomy to move men's souls.

How many mistakes to excuse for getting the vibe right? How much to condemn for getting the facts wrong? Why are history readers forced, too often, to chose?

I WON'T MENTION the name of another book I reviewed recently, by a University of Wisconsin professor, published by Cornell University Press, that manages to make one of the most inherently gripping events in recent American history—the takeover of the Cornell student union by African-American militants with machine guns—as boring as a computer manual. Boy, was that book exact—all the way down to just about every letter, memo, meeting, and *post hoc* reflection the event ever produced, until the reader is left with so many undifferentiated grains of narrative that what should stick out like a boulder (a militant announcing over campus radio that "before this is over James Perkins, Allan Sindler, and Clinton Rossiter are going to die in the gutter") looks the same, vibe-wise, as a minority report of the student disciplinary committee. You can build a castle out of undifferentiated grains of sand. But it washes from the mind at the first new tide. The book I'm talking about is quite self-consciously aimed at reform-minded university administrators. It will miss. Just because you've put facts and analysis down on the page doesn't mean a reader will remember it. For that, a professor has to seize the imagination. And the professional readers for Cornell University Press won't make them do it.

On the other hand. One of the casualties of these years of market triumphalism is the ancient idea of the guild—a group of professionals who regulate themselves by standards, both internalized and externalized, formed and upheld by those whom they have apprenticed under. Doctors once were trusted to make their own decisions; now health maintenance organization accountants do it for them. Teachers were once trusted to teach; now their stu-

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dents are given high-stakes tests to guarantee "accountability." But despite the best attempts of some state legislatures, professors have held their guild intact.

My old history professor is right: history professors—*all* professors—have something precious. Without recourse to guild members' accountability to one another—and the good old-fashioned internalized shame at betraying it—a nonacademic historian is left to his or her initiative, to compel the level of exactitude that propels scholars through their profession's hoops as a matter of course. And HarperDisneyRandom won't make them do it; the logic of the market guarantees that. More footnotes just mean more pages to print. Here, it is the guild that beats the market every time. Professors will begin to write better—beyond cases of individual initiative, which social democrats know is never enough—just as soon as other professors begin to demand it. ●

RICK PERLSTEIN 's book on the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign will appear in the spring.

Noah Isenberg

Picking Up the Pieces

ZIG ZAG: THE POLITICS OF CULTURE AND VICE VERSA
by Hans Magnus Enzensberger
(trans. Linda Haverty Rugg, et al.)
The New Press, 1998 342 pp $25

THERE IS A cherished anecdote told every now and then at Wesleyan University, where I teach. It involves the German poet, essayist, and social critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who had come to spend a year, 1967-1968, as a fellow at Wesleyan's Center for Advanced Studies. During his first semester, so the story goes, Enzensberger found himself increasingly disillusioned with American politics and with what he saw as an oppressive atmosphere that precluded active engagement among the students and faculty. He felt detached, stifled, incapable of completing his two-term stint. Thus, after only three months of residency, he abandoned Middletown, Connecticut for Havana, Cuba—a place where he believed he would be far more apt to fulfill his ideological dreams. "I just feel that I can learn more from the Cuban people and be of greater use to them," he explained, "than I could ever be to the students of Wesleyan University."

The tale of Enzensberger's departure traveled well beyond the brick walls of the New England campus. In the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, his impassioned letter of resignation appeared under the title "On Leaving America." "I believe the class which rules the United States of America," he wrote, "and the government which implements its policies, to be the most dangerous body of men on earth. In one way or another, and to a different degree, this class is a threat to anybody who is not part of it. It is waging an undeclared war against more than a billion people; its weapons range from saturation bombing to the most delicate techniques of persuasion; its aim is to establish its political, economic, and military predominance over every other power in the world. Its mortal enemy is revolutionary change." With his letter, Enzensberger, who had already established himself as an outspoken figure within the German New Left, declared the need to recognize the magnitude of the Vietnam War and other U.S.-sponsored campaigns of aggression around the globe. He went so far as to draw what now may appear as grossly misplaced comparisons between the political climate of America in the late 1960s and that of Germany in the mid-1930s. (America, Enzensberger

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claimed, had surpassed Nazi Germany in terms of its power of destruction, as well as in its "subtlety" and "sophistication.")

Enzensberger, who will turn seventy this fall, has never been one to shy away from debate, nor from taking positions that he might later revise or even regret. His first books of poetry, published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, evoked in piercingly clear tones the youthful indignation that would mark the enduring generational strife of postwar West Germany. Much like Bertolt Brecht before him, he was acutely aware of the ideological function of the writer. In 1965, he founded *Kursbuch*, a prominent journal of cultural and political exchange, initially of a more revolutionary bent, which he edited for ten years. As the author of countless essays, he earned the reputation of a master of polemic, a stylist with verve and substance, a witty and sharp-tongued critic in a venerable tradition leading back to Heinrich Heine via Kurt Tucholsky, Karl Kraus, and Theodor W. Adorno. During his extended career, he has weighed in on debates concerning the manipulation of the media (or what, in 1962, he famously dubbed the "consciousness industry," his own much-augmented rendition of Adorno's "culture industry"), the legacy of Western colonialism, the European Union and the World Bank, mass migrations, the Gulf War, and, most recently, the German-sanctioned NATO involvement in Kosovo. His contribution to major cultural and political discussions of the past four decades is something remarkable.

This is what makes his latest volume of essays, *Zig Zag: The Politics of Culture and Vice Versa*, so rewarding—it provides us with the opportunity to survey some of his most provocative and stimulating writing. Enzensberger has collected twenty pieces, dating from 1962 to 1997 (and deftly translated by Linda Haverty Rugg, Martin Chalmers, and others), which document his odyssey as a public intellectual. Rather than simply moving chronologically, the essays are arranged in three parts, in what may be loosely categorized as philosophical reflections, political interventions, and cultural critique (though of course there are elements of all three in each of the parts). There are biting polemics—some more successful than others—alongside empirical investigations, reportage, animated musings, and bon mots. Once pronounced a "one-man think tank," Enzensberger shows himself to be just as much at ease while graphically expounding upon the mathematical limitlessness of time (by way of a complicated exercise based on pastry dough, or the "baker's transformation"), as when analyzing the so-called "reluctant Eurocentrism" of the European left.

Enzensberger's subject matter is equally complex and wide ranging. Consider, for instance, his 1962 tract "The Industrialization of the Mind." Taking as his point of departure the commonly held belief that "we reign supreme in our own consciousness, that we are masters of what our minds accept or reject," Enzensberger insists that "consciousness" (like art, à la Walter Benjamin) can be mechanically reproduced and altered. Even if we wish to consider the individual mind to be the "last citadel" or our "imaginary fortress," its autonomy is merely an illusion. "The mind industry," he warns, "can take on anything, digest it, reproduce it, and pour it out. Whatever our minds can conceive of is grist to its mill; nothing will leave it unadulterated—it is capable of turning any idea into a slogan and any work of the imagination into a hit."

In the current age of information, of Web banners, Internet commerce, and the intense proliferation of data stored in cyberspace, Enzensberger's cautionary words remain resonant and seem, perhaps, even prescient. "Whether we realize it or not, the mind industry is growing faster than any other, not excluding armament. It has become the key industry of the twentieth century. Those who are concerned in the power game of today, political leaders, intelligence men, and revolutionaries, have very well grasped this crucial fact." We may detect various parallels between the ideas of Enzensberger and those of such diverse thinkers as Marshall McLuhan, Harold Rosenberg, and Ariel Dorfman (in his instructive preface to a 1998 *Salmagundi* symposium on Enzensberger's "Consciousness Industry," Robert Boyers compiled a brilliant array of excerpts from writers like these to demonstrate their affinities with Enzensberger). Unique to

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Enzensberger, however, is the stark antinomian character of his writing, drawing as it does on contradictory bits and pieces in order to render a more nuanced analysis. Although his remarks may be read within the context of the 1960s, as part of the broader reception of the Frankfurt School among students and members of the German New Left, their implications have also been felt by future generations. As Enzensberger himself notes in a later essay, commenting somewhat ruefully on the situation of his daughter in the 1970s, "She would be more likely to quote a television advertisement than a poem, *Der Spiegel* than Samuel Beckett, and Woody Allen than Adorno." His sharp critique of the mass media—with both its radical and its culturally conservative, high-low dimensions—is something that has remained on the purview of his thought in the many years since.

Writing in 1988, in a piece titled "The Zero Medium: or, Why all Complaints about Television are Pointless," Enzensberger casts a skeptical eye on television—referred to elsewhere in the volume as "crap with gravy"—as a monster that has run amok, leaving in its wake a devastating blow to contemporary culture. It has, in short, helped to dumb down the masses, to promote illiteracy, and to homogenize the public sphere. "Television is employed primarily as a well-defined method of pleasurable brainwashing," he asserts. "[I]t serves as personal hygiene, as self-medication. The zero medium is the only universal and widely distributed form of psychotherapy." The enjoyment derived from watching television has, in Enzensberger's estimation, a "quasi-religious" dimension, for "it represents the technological approximation of nirvana." In terms of its distinction from film—in particular, from art cinema—television's potential as an aesthetic medium is severely impaired by its own essential features. As Enzensberger puts it, "it is destroyed by the ridiculous format, the interruption of the advertising breaks, and the indifferent endless repeats; the viewer's secret weapon, the dreaded channel-surfing, gives the film the coup de grâce."

There is an underlying current of pessimism, a strain of "leftist melancholy," that reappears at several junctures in the essays collected in *Zig Zag*. We are made privy to his dim prognosis of the status of literature: "It has lost weight. It is conceding ever more territory. Its importance is not what it was." And, in "Two Notes on the End of the World" (1978), we witness his gloomy, if also ironic, thoughts on the "negative utopia": "The apocalypse is part of our ideological baggage. It is an aphrodisiac. It is a nightmare. It is a commodity like any other. You can call it a metaphor for the collapse of capitalism, which as we all know has been imminent for more than a century." Perhaps we should recall that this is the same Enzensberger who during that year published his epic poem *The Sinking of the Titanic*, a poignant evocation of the fall of Western civilization. The revolution that Enzensberger had once hoped for never occurred; this may help to explain the kind of reckoning that crops up in some of his later writings. "Class struggle (*Klassenkampf*) will not take place," he lamented in a 1998 issue of *Der Spiegel*. "Its substitute is the spectacle. The aesthetics of superficiality triumphs."

Among the struggles described in *Zig Zag* is "My Fifty-Year Effort to Discover America," a lecture that Enzensberger delivered at New York University in 1997. In his highly personal account, Enzensberger not only revisits his ill-fated fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies ("it was clear to me that there was something faintly ridiculous about my act"), but also ventures further back to his first encounters with American culture. Born in a small Bavarian town in 1929, Enzensberger came of age during the Third Reich, and as a boy he envisioned America as "a continent of pure fantasy," an intriguing "figment, like something out of children's books." Yet his first "real" encounter with America was anything but abstract. While walking the bombed-out route to school, as a *Gymnasium* student in 1944, the fifteen-year-old Enzensberger is confronted by an American fighter plane that opens fire on him and two of his classmates. Having survived the spray of ammunition in a ditch next to the road, Enzensberger recalls this event, with some irony, as "an altogether exhilarating experience." He goes on to de-

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scribe his short-lived career as a teenage draftee, his risky desertion, and his first taste of American occupation. "They were well-fed," he writes of the U.S. troops, "their khaki trousers were clean and neat, and their attitude was supremely insouciant. . . . Some of them were black giants, and they were chewing a substance unknown in our part of the world and tasting of peppermint." Enzensberger eventually found himself in the unexpected role of interpreter. As a result, he gained access to the exotic luxury of the "C-ration," and, more important, to a box of English books, "a wild mixture of thrillers and classics, pulp fiction and philosophy."

Throughout his remarks, Enzensberger retains a level of ambivalence, part genuine affection, part acerbic critique. He appreciates the opportunity he received to travel to the United States on an early Fulbright student exchange, in 1953, but he also deplores what he observes—racial segregation, sensationalist advertising, and a cynical entertainment industry that relies on choreographed audience response. He similarly admires American cultural magazines such as the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and the *Nation* (upon which he modeled a German monthly review, *TransAtlantik*, which he founded in 1980), at the same time castigating the cultural isolationism that keeps the American people from learning foreign languages and American publishers from publishing foreign literature. For Enzensberger, there can be no resolution of his conflicting observations. "After so many exciting expeditions, I realize that I have failed to discover America. How could I make up my mind about it, torn as I am between shock and gratitude, bliss and frustration, dismay and surprise?" To which he adds: "Of all my lifelong failures, this is the one which I would hate to do without."

Given Enzensberger's predilection for the polemic, it is inevitable that not all of the essays in *Zig Zag* come off as even-handedly as his personal reflections on America. In fact, if his open letter from 1968 suffered from his relativist analogy of Nazi Germany and America in the sixties, then his piece on Saddam Hussein, "Hitler Walks Again" (1992), raises the stakes even higher. In another odd rhetorical twist, Enzensberger appears convinced that the Iraqi tyrant is none other than "Hitler's genuine successor." Not only does he see parallels in their respective *Weltanschauungen* ("His motive is his death wish, his method of governing is destruction"), but also in their support bases, albeit from a historically inverted angle: "The Nazis were the Iraqis of 1938-1945." The comparison is a desperate one, one that seeks to debunk the notion of the "blood lust of Hitler" as the ultimate expression of "some peculiarity of the German character." According to Enzensberger, "This continuity proves that we are dealing with neither a German nor an Arab phenomenon, but an anthropological one." But even his postscript, an anecdotal report of Saddam's passion for *Mein Kampf*, shows signs of an argument that knows it cannot hold.

Because of the divergent and occasionally downright infuriating positions that Enzensberger has taken over the years, he has been an enigma among critics, a writer who eludes classification. One commentator recently called him a "master of metamorphosis," while another, already in 1970, noted that Enzensberger was "essentially unwilling to settle down in any place or way of thought." It is no coincidence that his collection bears the title *Zig Zag*. For Enzensberger's thought, as chronicled in the twenty pieces he selected, does not follow any linear trajectory of development. He swings from the left to the right, from manifesto-like revolutionary cries to a conservative stance on culture, and back again. Although he has been hailed as one of Germany's greatest postwar writers, receiving among many awards the prestigious Georg Büchner Prize, he has also been derided as a shifty provocateur. Yet it is the unorthodox nature of his writing—the combination of mordant wit, imagination, and rigor—that makes Enzensberger unique. ●

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NATO's War and the Left

Editors:

No veteran reader of *Dissent* will be surprised at the editorial support of a recent U.S. war (or the next either, wherever that may be). But what is striking, no less than in the provocative lead essay by Alice Amsden and Takashi Hikino ("The Left and Globalization," Spring 1999), is the complete absence of ecological consideration. The early warnings against the immediate, lasting radiation danger from uranium-tipped shells, the anticipated consequences of bombing chemical factories, and the wholesale destruction of conservation and wildlife areas all seem to have fallen upon deaf ears.

Now that the stories of abortions (spontaneous or otherwise) have begun to emerge, with war's heritage of poisoned air, land, and waterways making future health problematic for all survivors; now that labor has finally joined in the cry against toxic dumping in the Americas; now that the Red Cross has declared that more refugees exist from "environmental disasters" than from wars, perhaps the whole issue of "collateral damage" will finally come into view. Why, in the wounded and suffering world, did we have to wait so long?

Paul Buhle
Providence, R.I.

Editors:

Michael Walzer, commenting on the lack of NATO ground troops in the Kosovo war ("Kosovo," Summer 1999), suggests the danger of a "new and dangerous inequality." "You can't kill unless you are prepared to die." We cannot claim, he says, that the lives of Serb soldiers are expendable while those of our soldiers are not.

Surely the important thing in Kosovo was to stop Serb aggression. Presumably more lives could have been saved, atrocities prevented, with less "collateral damage," if ground troops were used, so it should have been done. Death and injury among U.S. troops would be consequences—unintended, inevitable, and regrettable—of their employment, not the moral justification of their use. As Walzer says, "Leaders [must] safeguard the lives of their own people, all of them." If you could use troops effectively without casualties or even the risk of casualties, then so much the better. In jousting and dueling, honor demands bravery and physical risk. Does Milosevic require this of us? If a police sniper shoots a gunman who is killing people, is it morally important for that police officer to be at risk of getting killed?

If the leader risks the death of soldiers in waging war, perhaps that enhances the possibility that going to war is done with due deliberation and gravity, giving the decision moral weight. But it doesn't always (did the Serbs' risking death give them moral authority?). And there are other ways of enhancing moral seriousness.

Risk for pragmatic reasons, yes, but please, no false heroics or wrong notes from the armchairs of the left.

Arnold Lieber
New York, N.Y.

Editors:

It is amazing to see a magazine that calls itself *Dissent* fall in line behind NATO's war the way you have, with articles such as those in the Summer issue that offer only generalities about "firefighters" and the responsibilities of the left (or information on the role of the Internet that passes over the most powerful Web sites critiquing the war). A responsible critique of the new NATO is imperative today, one that exposes the dangers of "liberal humanitarian imperialism." Criticizing NATO does not require becoming an apologist for Milosevic, but it does involve shifting one's focus to the perils of the larger picture, one in which a small country is attacked relentlessly by a supranational institution defining itself so as to escape the strictures of international law. Where does *Dissent* examine these complexities? Nowhere, so far as I can see. Shame on you.

Ellen Michel
Bloomington, Ind.

Foreign Policy

Editors:

Thanks and applause for James Rule's "On Evils Abroad and America's New World Order" (Summer

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1999). All the essay's emphases are right: skepticism about official justifications for the use of force; awareness of officially manipulation of public discussion; rejection of elite definitions of "national interest"; recognition of the material and civic costs of a militarized foreign policy. In particular, the list of questions Rule urges his readers to consider when evaluating foreign interventions can hardly be improved on.

"What does this mean, practically?" Rule imagined some readers asking doubtfully. As he acknowledged, "any thorough answer to this utterly legitimate question" was beyond the scope of that essay. One fervently hopes that the editors of *Dissent* will encourage him to pursue this question in future issues.

GEORGE SCIALABBA
Cambridge, Mass.

What About Parents' Rights?

Editors:

Why no mention of parents' rights in Marjorie Heins's knowledgeable article ("Rejuvenating Free Expression: An Argument for Minors' First Amendment Rights," Summer 1999)?

It seems to me that the primary reason why the state cannot dictate what children should learn or not learn is that it cannot do so without violating the rights of parents to raise their children. If a thirteen-year-old's parents want her to read Morrison's *Beloved* or see Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, what right has the state to interfere?

Admittedly, the state has the right to protect the child when parents are totally unfit or patently abusive. But American law has always given parental rights first preference in the final say on children's education.

Parenting is an essentially human endeavor, and parents, being human, are imperfect. (And the state is also a human endeavor and imperfect.) Tradition and most laws presuppose that the best way to handle the raising of children is to leave it to the parents, even though the state can and should provide assistance. Admittedly, there is considerable subjective judgment involved. And there has to be. The big question—When is the child mature enough?—differs for every child and frequently for the same child under different circumstances.

In our current, very mixed society, parents have to learn that they cannot dictate to other parents, which is what they do when they ban books in libraries or films in schools. They have the right to withdraw their child from particular classes or activities, or even to teach their children at home. But they have no right to limit freedom of expression in public facilities used by other people's children.

I am not a legal expert, but I am puzzled that the courts have never made the point that freedom of speech begins in the home with the rights of parents to communicate with their children. Or have they?

JIM MANN
Gales Ferry, Conn.

Marjorie Heins Replies:

Jim Mann is correct in pointing out the contradiction between the government's protestations in harm-to-minors cases that it is helping parents control their children's reading and its insistence on imposing its own, presumably majoritarian, standards of morality or decorum. The Supreme Court has never faced this problem—indeed, in the *Pacifica* (seven dirty words) case, it pretended that the two interests converged. Justice Brennan's dissent in *Pacifica*, however, and Justice Fortas's ten years earlier in the *Ginsberg v. New York* "variable obscenity" case did (in Fortas's words) question the wisdom of giving the state "a role in the rearing of children which is contrary to our traditions and to our conception of family responsibility." Several years ago, D.C. Circuit Judge Harry Edwards wrote in a dissent to a decision upholding the Federal Communications Commission's relegation of indecent speech to late-night hours:

> I do not comprehend how the two interests can stand together. . . . A law that effectively *bans* all indecent programming—as does the statute in this case—does not facilitate parental supervision. In my view, my right as a parent has been preempted, not facilitated, if I am told that certain programming will be banned from my television.

Of course, these have all been dissenting opinions. But the issue is before the Supreme Court again this term in *Playboy v. FCC*, a challenge to a law that requires cable companies to make sure that any "sexually explicit" or "indecent" signal bleed (intermittent sounds or images from sexually oriented cable channels) is totally blocked from households that have not subscribed to the channels, or else aired only after 10 P.M. The Department of Justice argues that the law is necessary to help parents who haven't subscribed to channels like Playboy in supervising their children, and also in enforcing the government's own interest in the "well-being" of minors. But the evidence in the case suggests that most parents are simply not concerned that accidental exposure to

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fleeting televised sounds or images of sex will have a dire effect upon their children. The Justice Department's brief views these parents as careless or distracted (and therefore in need of the government's assistance); it apparently cannot imagine that large numbers of parents might have child-rearing philosophies that differ from its own.

Opera, the State, and Subsidy

Editors:

Dissent is to be congratulated on the opera argument between Bruce Ackerman and Mitchell Cohen ("Should Opera Be Subsidized?" Summer 1999). Rarely are issues concerning the performing arts addressed in the American press, especially the left. As a composer, performer, and educator, my sympathies fall with Cohen's point of view. Unfortunately, both arguments ignore the real issues.

Opera is neither a religion nor a political movement. Nor is it some form of subliminal argument for secular humanism. Opera is an artistic mixed medium whose primary function is to express an aesthetic message. American culture (with a small *c*) seems incapable of understanding the human need for the aesthetic experience and does not quite know what to do with it. When art issues are discussed, they are always set in an economic or political context. Again, this is especially true in the leftist press.

Other industrialized societies understand the inherent human need to experience art, and that it is essential to the quality of life. The French national government spends three and a half billion dollars a year supporting art. This funding is unquestioned and exists with both liberal and conservative governments. As with other countries, France realizes that the aesthetic experience cannot be supported exclusively in the marketplace, and that it is the responsibility of a mature government to make art available to all of its citizens.

For some of us liberal, secular humanist, social democrats, an ideal government would, among other services, provide quality universal health care, seriously attempt to eliminate poverty, and support and encourage all the arts, including opera.

Rodney Oakes
San Pedro, Calif.

Editors:

I must say that Bruce Ackerman's rationale [against public funding of opera] was one of the more bizarre and outré I have heard. As I understand it, since opera is a secularized religious rite, it is subject to the doctrine of separation of church and state.

That opera can be a secularized quasi-religious experience is certainly true; that certain operas are quasi-religious experiences is also true. But who is to determine the "religiousness" of the experience? *Parsifal* at Bayreuth, *Saint François d'Assise* at Salzburg—or the Alagnas singing in *Romeo et Juliette*? And who is to limit the experience to "opera"? Symphonies, string ensembles, choral societies—all are helped at the public purse: is Schubert's *C Major Quintet* less "religious" than Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* or Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*? To single out opera from among the many cultural activities depending on tax-deductible contributions and public monies is, of course, arrant discrimination, particularly when dance (in all its guises) is not mentioned: dance, which is historically and culturally the fount of so much religious experience, and which continues to this day to have a religious connection far stronger than opera. You are disturbing the shade of Dionysius by ignoring him—at your peril. (See *The Bassarids*, by Hans Werner Henze.)

The fact is that American policy about the giving of public monies for the arts (and we here are only discussing the United States, for public funding in Europe is far too entrenched and societally accepted to be negated—though in the past decade it has been to an extent reduced) has been and continues to be based on criteria quite different from the "separation of church and state" rationale, and any serious attempt to argue it for opera alone will, I feel, release a host of bogeymen—which may be the ultimate point of the exercise. The whole question of the secularized religious experiences, however, both in for-profit and not-for-profit arts, is a topic that could yield enormous results if pursued.

Patrick Smith
New York, N.Y.

Ed. Note: The author is editor-at-large of *Opera News*.

Editors:

I have never seen anyone converted to or from religion by attending operas. One does not join opera, does not profess to "believe in" things in order to become an operalian. So, I tend not to view opera as an enemy of or alternative to (other) religions.

I support state funding for arts because I and others love art, because I see art as socially beneficial, because the funding is not always available elsewhere, and because state funding is democratic and noncommercial. Whether my support extends to opera depends on the funds available and projects in need, and—with some allowance for people' diversity of tastes—on my opinion

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of opera (which is rather low).

I do not support state funding of Catholic church services because I consider religion, on balance, harmful and would, in fact, like nonviolently but quite thoroughly *écraser l'infâme*. If I held the sort of neutral stance toward religion that Ackerman seems to, I would definitely want to fund Catholic services. I find them far more enjoyable and beautiful than operas. But I would not kid myself about my ability to impose such a neutral stance on theists like Stanley Fish or atheists like Cohen.

Faith in the market and in Marxism, belief in the "unnaturalness" of homosexuality, defense of various destructive "rights," adherence to principles and authorities even when harmful, avoidance of needed medical care, acceptance of the status quo as divinely decreed, faith that people get what they "deserve,"sexism, racism, divisiveness, and fear of sexual pleasure: religion bears too much of this fruit to outweigh the good that many people do in its name or the beauty of its celebrations.

I do not support banning religion, which I think would strengthen and worsen it.

DAVID SWANSON
Charlottesville, Va.

Editors:

Bruce Ackerman's neutral liberalism is an argument for a fatal cul-de-sac into which we may all naively enter. There is no comparison between a Catholic mass and an opera, for the mass is not entertainment, however dramatic and elaborate it may be. It is the celebration of a religious belief. Operas are not, even though some have religious themes.

Ackerman seems to be arguing that since opera has become an elite pastime (which it was not in earlier times) only the affluent should enjoy its pleasures. I find that argument profoundly undemocratic. With such attitudes we should have no public parks. Such facilities should be restricted to the affluent who can afford to have their own parks.

"Secular humanism," if you follow fundamentalist reasoning, encompasses all of modern science. The government, to be neutral, should therefore not spend even a penny on scientific research because it would then forfeit its neutrality between religion and science.

Unlike our scientists, the religious, especially the evangelicals and fundamentalists, have hundreds of television and radio programs, and some of their propaganda efforts are well funded by millionaires. The power of these hard-core religionists has forced their God into our national pledge of allegiance and is responsible for innumerable acts of censorship in libraries and schools. Their aims are subversive. They do not believe in freedom of religion or separation of church and state. Their influence in the Republican Party has been formidable.

So this is not merely a question of subsidies for operas, and is not so rarefied as to involve Plato and Aristotle. It is a question of the influence of the theocrats versus democrats, as well as a question of culture for the masses or only for the (upper) classes.

Let all children taste the glories of the arts and the sciences. These must be governmentally subsidized. How else will these get into the school curricula? And why only the children? Adults, too, need subsidies for what the market does not provide. If there is no opera on commercial television, how can the non-affluent ever acquire a taste for it?

If we can afford subsidies for stadiums and for corporate empires, certainly we can afford subsidies for "high" culture. The question of the opera is a tiny portion of a much larger question.

LAURENCE G. WOLF
Cincinnati, Ohio

Translators Wanted

Dissent sometimes needs translators. Usually this work entails translation from a European language (but sometimes others, too) into English. Essential to the task is the ability to translate accurately into smooth literary English (no deconstructionese or social scientese). We pay very, very modestly. In other words, you should be someone who appreciates what *Dissent* represents, wants to help out, and is willing to work on occasion for less than what you are worth. Drop us a line.

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● *We welcome succinct letters from our readers. But because we have a long "lead time" for each issue, you have to send us your letter within three weeks after getting an issue of* Dissent *in order to get it into the next issue.*

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No social movement can thrive without the energy of the emerging generation, and from this perspective the Columbine High School shooting was awful in more than the obvious way. Amid the anguish, indignation, hysteria, and political posturing that followed the events in Littleton, what struck me most keenly was the silence: the eclipse of young people as social and political actors. Yes, we heard a lot about teenage culture, with its seemingly intractable hierarchies, cliques, and brutal exclusions; and hardly anyone argued, as they might have done had this been the first such incident, that these were just two psychopathic kids whose actions reflected on no one but themselves. It was widely assumed that if mass murder was erupting in the heart of white, middle-class suburbia, some sort of social critique was in order. A few intrepid souls, noting the gender of every school shooter to date, even suggested that masculinism and homophobia might have something to do with the case. Yet the spirit of the public discussion was mainly that of panicked prison guards who had lost control of the inmates. How to get it back?

With teeth-grinding superficiality, liberals demanded gun control, conservatives the posting of the Ten Commandments, while the usual coalition of pop-culture bashers blamed the media. There was much curiosity (laced with schadenfreude) about the killers' parents—how could they not have known? what had they neglected to do?—and a hasty dropping of the subject when it appeared that their lives and child-rearing practices were more or less indistinguishable from their neighbors'.

But what I want to know, and have heard virtually nothing about, is this: how do teenagers in "normal" middle-class suburbs feel, not only about their present lives but about the adult world? What do they think about their own prospects? Do they have any concept at all of having individual or collective power to influence their condition?

In the eighties there were two highly publicized "youth violence" crises: escalating gang warfare among inner-city black kids and a wave of suicides among white teenagers in working-class suburbs. Efforts to understand these events from their protagonists' perspective—like *Do or Die*, Léon Bing's report on gangbangers in L.A., and *Teenage Wasteland*, Donna Gaines's account of high school "burnouts" in Bergenfield, New Jersey—suggested that in different ways both groups were dying, literally and figuratively, of their lack of a sense of possibility. They saw death as a logical extension of lives they could not imagine changing, and at the same time as the only choice that was truly theirs.

Both these groups were losers, in terms of mainstream American criteria. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were losers too. But there is a crucial difference. They were not excluded from the shiny, happy opportunity society by virtue of their race or class, but because on some deep level they revolted against joining up. Many others share their refusal, though few express it in spectacular crimes. (And here it should be noted that while boys have seized the gun, girls—from northeastern suburbs where legal abortion is readily available—have chosen to give birth and kill their infants.) Quiet despair is far more common than murderous rage. As for the winners, the jocks and cheerleaders and their ilk, can we assume that they're content with the terms of their victory? That they had anything to do with setting those terms? That they would not want something else—if they could imagine what that something might be?

These days we are constantly told that what is cannot be otherwise. Plutocracy is. Social Darwinism is. The notion that change of any but the most cautious, incremental sort is either necessary or possible is looney tunes. While the right celebrates the end of history, the left huddles in a corner hoarding scraps of the New Deal. The Littleton generation is on its own.

Ellen Willis

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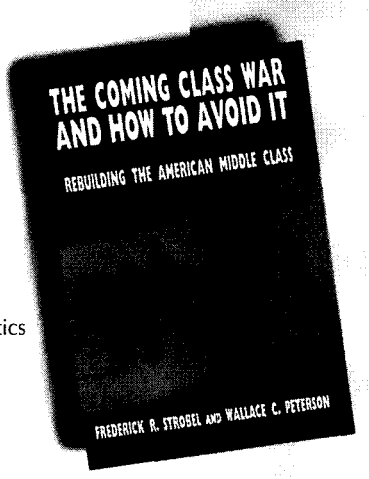
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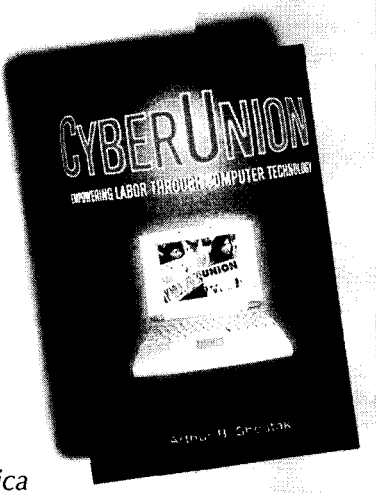

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